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Del Piero

The exclusive interview

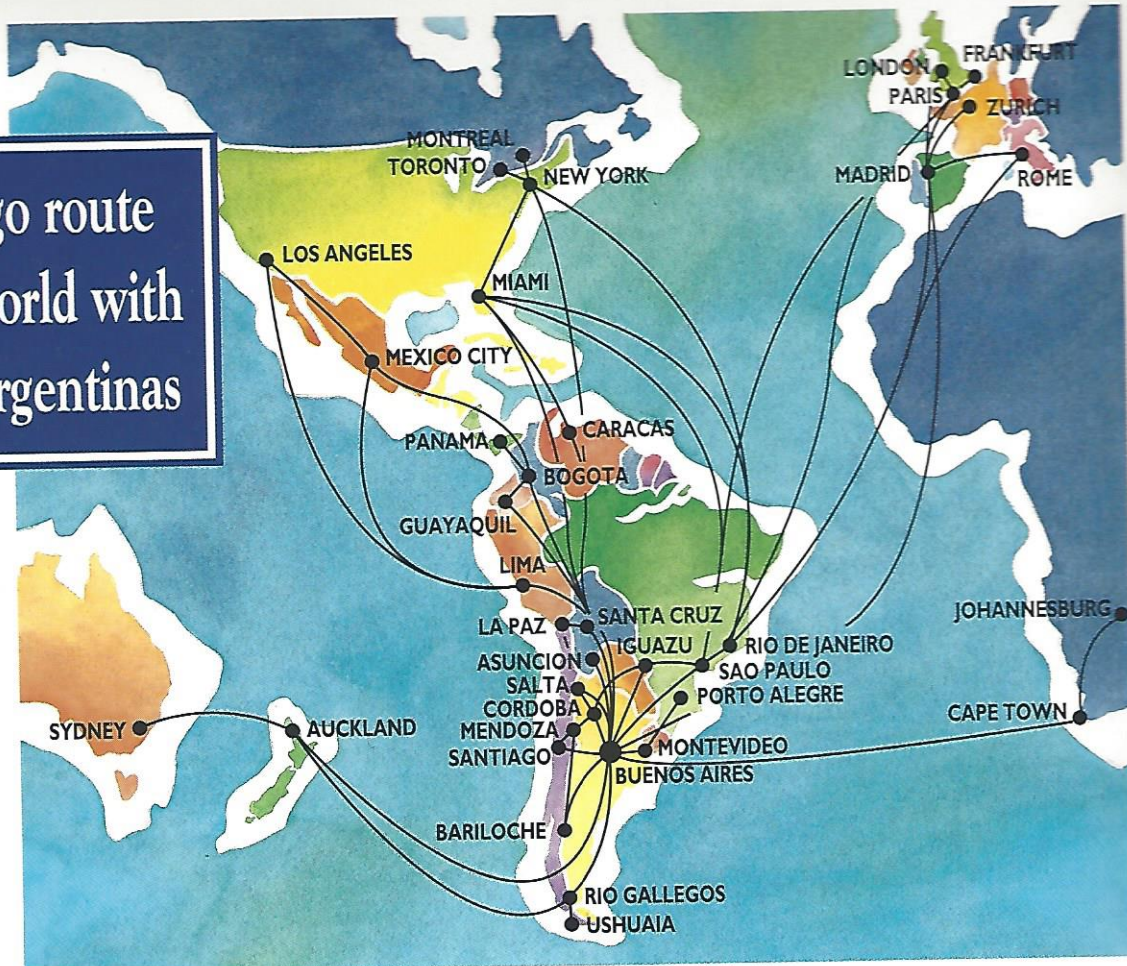
VENABLES TAKES CHARGE

STEVE WAUGH

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Robbie Slater*

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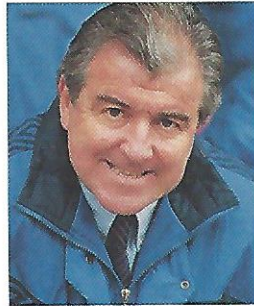
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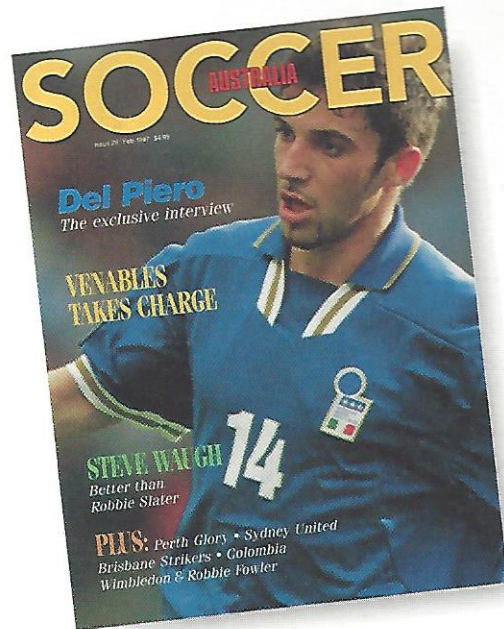
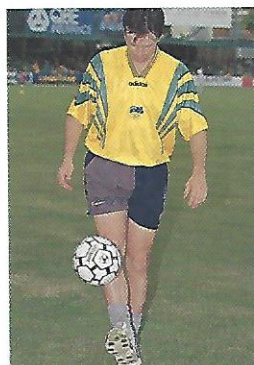
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1996 in



Badge of Courage?

The logos controversy threatened to tear the national league apart, but didn't achieve much one way or another in the end. Here Nick Orlic models South Melbourne's discreetly-redesigned club badge.

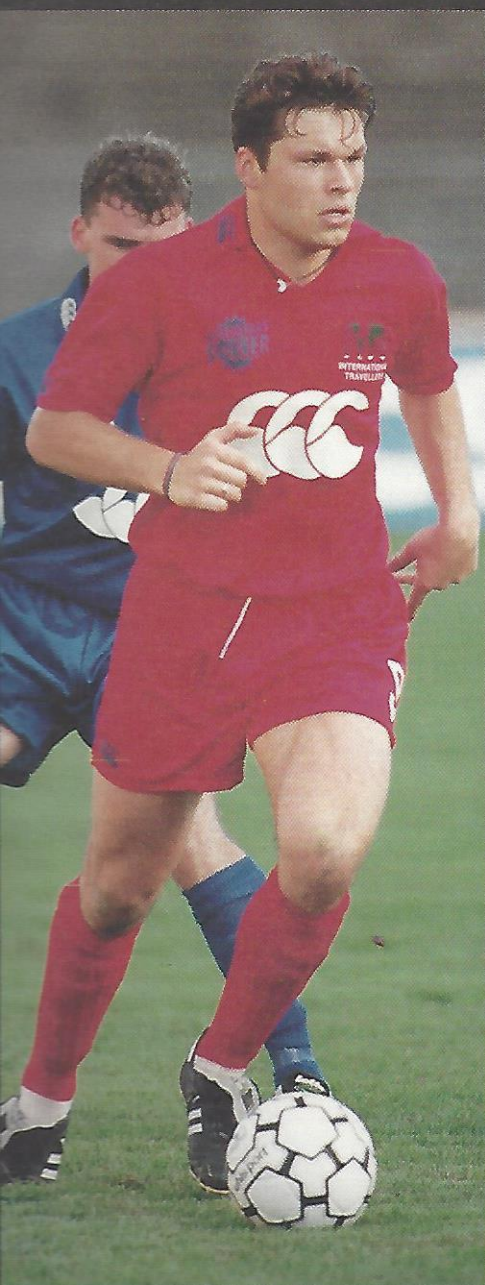
compiled by Patrick Mangan

review

Channel Nine Soccer Shock

1996 featured the 'Superstars of Soccer' series between the locally-based True Blues and our overseas Socceroos, the International Travellers.

The event scored a surprise ratings victory for Channel Nine, but the absence of Okon, Zelic, Slater, Lazaridis, Moore etc was a disappointment. And just one question - who were we supposed to barrack for?



Teething Problems

Collingwood Warriors' entry into the national competition was rightly heralded as a coup for the game, and when 13,000 fans packed Victoria Park to see the new club register a 3-0 victory against reigning champions Melbourne Knights in their first game, it seemed to be plain sailing ahead for coach Zoran Matic's outfit.

But since their opening day success, organisational and marketing problems, a threadbare first team squad, and the untimely loss of Goran Lozanovski through injury have seen the Warriors slide down the league as fast as their support base has been dwindling. Collingwood will have to show all the legendary fighting spirit of their AFL namesake to get the club back on track.



Knights Take the Title

Melbourne Knights defied the odds to retain their national league title. The transfer of spearhead Mark Viduka and sweeper Steve Horvat to Europe, injuries, suspensions and the loss of key players to the Olyroos during the finals weren't enough to stop Ian Dobson's defiant side.

The 1995 champions had plenty of critics throughout the first half of the 1996 season, but in the end all that mattered to the Knights faithful was the result on the Olympic Park scoreboard on 26 May - Melbourne Knights 2, Marconi 1.

Mori - The Wonder year

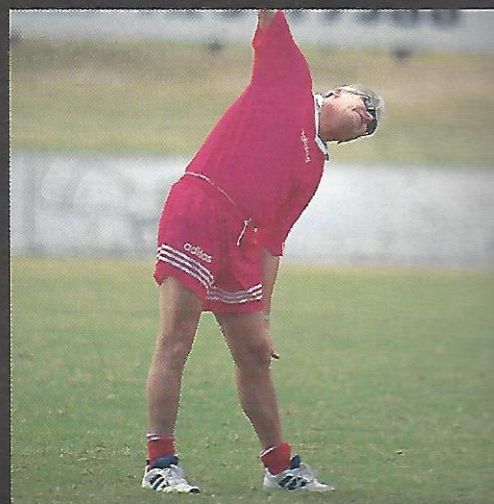
The wide-eyed Socceroo goal-poacher had a remarkable year, culminating in his transfer to Bundesliga heavyweights, Borussia Moenchengladbach. Following hot on the heels of his Guinness Book of Records effort against Sydney United, his 31 league goals for Adelaide City last season crushed the old individual record held by Newcastle Breakers' boss, John Kosmina.

A brave headed goal for Australia against Japan in Melbourne was followed by a string of impressive performances in the Simba Cup in South Africa which prompted the German club to pounce for his signature. Although the likeable striker is yet to open his scoring account for the relegation-threatened Moenchengladbach, Mori should be well-pleased as he reflects on the upward spiral of his career over the last 12 months.

Thommo Hits the Road

Eddie Thomson resigned from his Socceroo post to take the reins at Sanfrece in Japan. His six-year tenure as national team coach was never uneventful, but how will history judge the canny Scot?

Will we associate Thommo with Zelic's wonder goal against the Dutch Olympic team, the spine-tingling penalty shootout against Canada and Australia's heroic performances against the mighty Argentinians in the 1993 World Cup qualifiers? Or did the Socceroos have one scoreless bore draw too many in the last couple of years for us to remember Eddie with a wee smile?



Not what's not

The Soccer Players' Commission -

at first glance it appears that little will change in the immediate future, but in the long term this development is crucial to the success of the game in Australia. Now that the players have an effective voice, it's time for the coaches and the fans to organise themselves.

Optus World Soccer Series -

at last! The chance to see a four nation tournament involving senior international teams. Okay, so it ain't Brazil, Germany and Italy, but it does give Australia the chance to play three full internationals against different opponents in the space of a week. Something we need to do a lot more of.

Sydney United -

not only is Branko Culina's team the best in the league, but also the most stylish and skilful. Now, if all teams played this well...

Perth Glory -

Perth's success makes their exclusion from the NSL until 1996 even more inexcusable. If Despotovski keeps on converting the chances created by Naven and co., the Glory may have to find a bigger home ground!

The Perth soccer public -

congratulations, people! You're really showing some of the so-called fans in the eastern states what bums on seats can do for team morale.

Raul Blanco -

Raul could have been forgiven for sulking away after not getting the Socceroo job, but luckily for Venables and Australia he is a bigger man than that and is still happy to serve his country.

Nick Theodorakopoulos -

the Wolves were an embarrassment this time last year, but Nick has turned them into a competitive team that may even make the finals. And all this without the resources available to big city clubs.

Terry Venables -

from Barcelona to Bondi Beach via Bisham Abbey, Terry's appointment shows the

ambition of Soccer Australia and provides us with the professionalism needed to make a big impact in France. If we get there...

David Zdrilic -

twelve goals in nine games is the sort of form that usually has scouts from the big clubs bashing your door down, but David is yet to attract the level of attention that almost smothered Damian Mori last season. When it arrives, hopefully he'll resist the temptation to go and play in a top European club's reserve team.

and what's not

Joe Simunic -

he's resisted the plea to still call Australia home and now joins Tony Dorigo and Craig "Playing soccer for Australia is like surfing for England" Johnston in our 'Hall of Shame'. But does Josip realistically think he can displace Stimac and Bilic in the Croatian team? Or is the limit of his ambition the Croatian youth team?

Daniel Allsopp -

twelve months ago he was one of the hottest young properties in the world, having just picked up the top scorer's award at the under-17 World Champion-ships in Ecuador. Soon after, he scored a stunning goal against West Adelaide in the first Ericsson Cup match played at Bob Jane Stadium. He is still scoring regularly these days, but in South Melbourne's youth team. One day we'll work out why our best young players go overseas.

Match day programmes -

a perennial whinge, but a valid one. How about printing the names and numbers of the youth team? How about a word from the coach? There is at least one coach who can find time to do a weekly column for an ethnic newspaper, but not for his own club's programme. And whatever happened to the plan for a national weekly match day programme? Little wonder the Soccer Australia marketing office has a revolving door.

STUDS UP

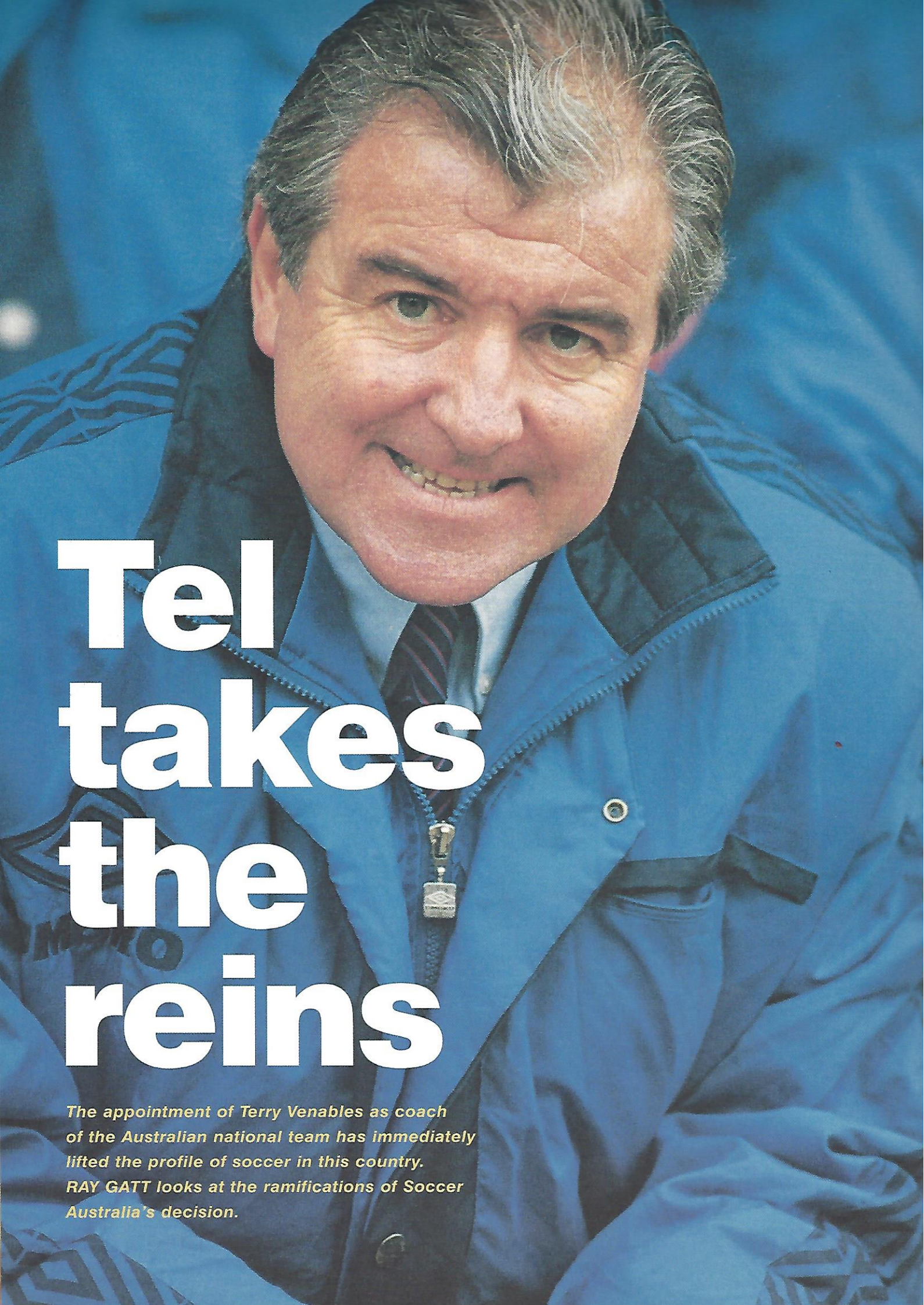
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Dare to be different





Tel takes the reins

The appointment of Terry Venables as coach of the Australian national team has immediately lifted the profile of soccer in this country.

RAY GATT looks at the ramifications of Soccer Australia's decision.

He has dabbled in everything from writing novels to penning newspaper columns to inventing board games and writing scripts.

He has been involved in more court cases than Alan Bond, loves the high life, smokes cigars and drinks champagne and owns a nightclub in London.

He had a great playing career with a number of London clubs, managed big name football outfits such as Barcelona and Tottenham Hotspur and took England to the Euro 96 semi-finals.

And now the man they call El Tel is going to try to get the Socceroos to the World Cup finals.

When Terry Venables, fresh from travelling first class for 24 hours, landed on these shores in January to take charge of the Australian squad for a four nation tournament he brought with him one of the

Venables - An English Perspective

There may have been some negative reaction in Australia to Terry Venables' appointment as Socceroo boss, but here's how they remember him back in the mother country.

"Venables and his England team took on Europe during the summer - and near as dammit beat them. The nation was left in no doubt that Venables was indeed the one and only person who had the tactical nous to succeed where lesser mortals had failed, the man who could restore English pride back home."

Four Four Two magazine

"So, was Terry Venables the best manager England have ever had? Euro '96 may have ended in glorious failure, but let's consider the evidence. Venables had just two and a half years of turgid friendlies to drag English football from the darkest depths of the (Graham) Taylor regime. He took the team to the threshold of a major final and Glenn Hoddle (Venables' successor as England coach) will inherit a young side that has yet to reach its peak."

Goal magazine

highest profiles in world football.

He also walked into the middle of one of the biggest controversies to hit the local sport since the Stewart and Senate inquiries into overseas transfers.

When Soccer Australia chairman David Hill proudly announced in London last November that he had snared the signature of El Tel, it was met with incredulous looks.

When the financial details - believed to total close to \$1.5 million for 18 months - and other terms of the contract started to filter through, incredulous looks turned to stunned disbelief and amazement.

There was disbelief that Hill could actually get past first base with Venables and amazement that Soccer Australia could come up with the big bucks to pay for someone of El Tel's world standing.

Equally there was amazement that the former England manager will only spend four months a year in Australia. The rest of the time he will spend in England 'looking after' the Socceroos' overseas-based players, getting them together for training camps and internationals.

Former Socceroo great John Warren, Australia's 1974 World Cup coach Rale Rasic, World Cup goalkeeper Jack Reilly, former national captain Charlie Yankos and SBS-TV head of sport Les Murray joined a long list of identities who have condemned the appointment.

They have all been outspoken in their comments with the general theme being that, given Venables is really only working on a part-time basis, it is a waste of money and that any one of a number of local coaches, including Raul Blanco, Zoran Matic, David Ratcliffe and Branko Culina, could have quite easily done the job.

On the other hand, there are those who say his coaching record is impeccable and that the mere mention of his name is enough to cause a media frenzy.

Hill believes El Tel can attract new sponsors and lift the sport to a new level on and off the field.

But the Soccer Australia boss has much to lose if Australia fails to qualify for the



Venables towards the end of his playing career at Queens Park Rangers.



El Tel in the hot seat at Barcelona

World Cup.

If the unthinkable happens, and the Socceroos dip out yet again, then Venables will not be the only casualty. Hill, and those Soccer Australia board members who have backed him in appointing El Tel, would have no alternative but to resign as well.

In assessing the merits or otherwise of Venables' appointment, I have categorised the situation in three parts; the Good, the Bad and the Ugly.

The Good

- Outstanding coaching credentials.
- Likes to play attractive, entertaining football.
- Stands by his players.
- His high profile which will generate publicity for Australian soccer.
- Likely to attract sponsorship.
- Should get worthwhile internationals for

Socceroos for which we can charge decent appearance fees.

The Bad

- His contract – the heavy cost estimated at \$1.5 million for 18 months.
- The job is not full-time.
- Won't be in the country long enough for the game to capitalise on his profile.
- No knowledge of the local football scene.
- The future of local-based players looks bleak.
- No incentive for young players to stay here.

The Ugly

- He has a number of court matters in the wind.
- Too many irons in the fire (chairman of Portsmouth, nightclub owner, other business interests).
- Venables being based in Europe establishes a class distinction between overseas-based Socceroos and locally-based Socceroos.

In any discussions or arguments concerning Venables, it should be pointed out that, for the dissenters, it is nothing personal against him.

After all, who could blame the man for accepting an offer which guarantees him a big pay packet for a part-time job in which he'll hardly have to leave his home in London?

The big carrot, however, is that he now has control of a team which, for the first time in more than 20 years has a great chance to qualify for a World Cup finals.

Australia has to beat a couple of teams from Oceania, notably New Zealand, before playing the fourth-placed country from Asia to qualify for France. A number of people have said their grandmothers could do the job.

As one wit suggested: "Venables is no fool. There aren't too many people who turn down Santa Claus when he comes knocking with his bag of goodies."

Not surprisingly, the mere mention of Venables' name sparks much interest and discussion.

Covering the England A one day cricket match against NSW in Sydney recently, I spoke with a number of English journalists who were travelling with the team throughout the country.

They expressed surprise that Australia would head-hunt Venables in the first place and even more surprised that he would actually take the job.

The general feeling was that Venables had hardly set the world on fire in his two and half years as England manager and that, apart from his success with Barcelona, he hadn't achieved all that much as a team leader.

They also wondered how Australian



Steve McManaman - his England career blossomed under Terry Venables' guidance.

soccer would cope with Tel's matters outside the game, such as the large number of impending court cases – the reason he quit England after Euro 96.

Indeed, his off-field situation has been the cause of much talk, especially through the tabloid English newspapers and even in the House of Commons.

One of Venables' harshe critics is Labour MP Kate

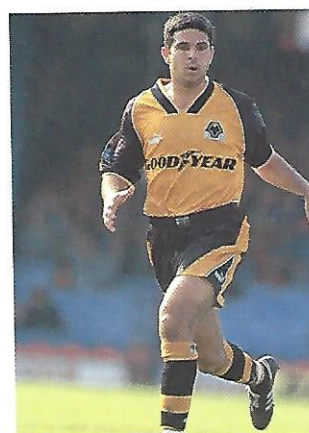
Hoey, who has attacked his personal integrity in the House a number of times.

During his tenure as England manager she campaigned vigorously for him to be dumped.

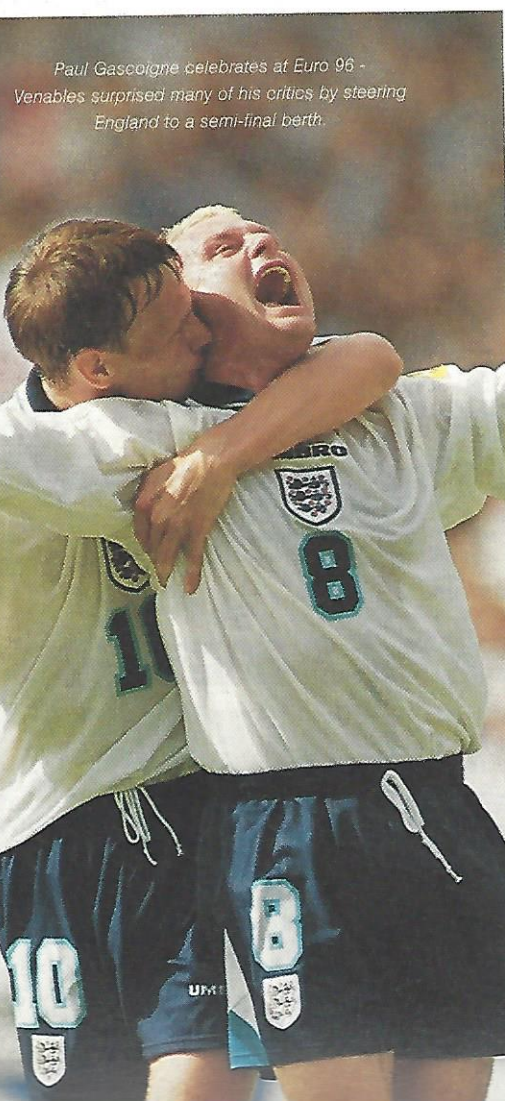
One newspaper report suggested that Hoey had reasoned that any man alleged to be unfit as a director of a British company was by definition excluded from soccer's top coaching job.

Seems which ever way you look at it, Australian

soccer is in for some interesting times in the not too distant future.



Wolverhampton Wanderers and Socceroo star Steve Corica is set to benefit from the appointment of the foreign-based Venables.



Paul Gascoigne celebrates at Euro 96 - Venables surprised many of his critics by steering England to a semi-final berth.

Fact File

Terry Venables

Born: January 6, 1943

Age: 54

Playing Career

Chelsea (1959-65) 202 games, 26 goals

Tottenham (1966-69) 114 games, 5 goals

QPR (1969-1974) 178 games, 19 goals.

Crystal Palace (1974-75) 14 games, 0 goals

England Internationals

Schoolboy (6 games). Amateur (1 game)

Youth (7 games). Under 23s (4 games).

Senior (2 games).

Management Career

Crystal Palace (1976-80), QPR (1980-83)

Barcelona (1984-87), Tottenham (1987-90)

England (1994-96).





Nine things you didn't need to know about Terry Venables.

■ Venables has always had an eye on the future. At the age of 17, he turned himself into a limited company. At the height of the swinging 60s and at the height of his playing career, he took typing lessons to help him with his writing.

■ He could have been a World Cup winner. In 1966, Venables was named in England's initial squad of 40 players, but was left out of the final 22. As you may have heard, England went on to win the World Cup.

■ He was a successful novelist. He was the co-author of a futuristic football novel called 'They Used To Play On Grass', as well as the 'Hazell' books, which were made into a television series.

■ One of his best friends in football is Leeds manager, George Graham. They were best man at each other's wedding when Venables was playing for Tottenham and Graham was with local rivals, Arsenal. Graham got married on the morning of a North London derby in 1967, so he found himself playing against his best man on his wedding day.

■ The appointment of the relatively-unknown Venables as Barcelona's coach in 1984 came as a surprise to some at the club. Barca's German midfield star, Bernd Schuster, asked if Barcelona had found Venables on the beach.

■ One of Venables' first acts at Barcelona was an even bigger shock than his appointment as coach - selling Diego Maradona to Napoli and replacing him with the dour Scot, Steve Archibald. Archibald scored 15 league goals and El Tel led Barca to their first Spanish championship in 11 years.

■ Barcelona finished first, second and second and reached the European Cup Final during Venables' three seasons, but it wasn't enough to keep him in the job. After his dismissal four games into the 1987/88 campaign, club president Jose Luis Nunez claimed, "The players begged me to sack Terry Venables".

■ Venables' last major honour as a coach came when his Tottenham side defeated Nottingham Forest 2-1 in the 1991 FA Cup Final. But the Spurs coach had other things on his mind in the week leading up to the game - on the night before the Cup Final, Venables met with the Tottenham chairman Irving Scholar in a failed bid to buy the club.

■ His early days as England coach were hampered by a falling out with Scholar's successor as Tottenham chairman, Alan Sugar. Sugar had the former Spurs manager banned from the club's White Hart Lane ground, but it didn't stop Venables from selecting a large number of Tottenham players in his England squads.

The Venables Method

Terry Venables' coaching pedigree is well-established, but how will the Socceroos actually play under their new coach once all the European-based players are available? UTS Olympic football manager STEVE DARBY offers his thoughts.

There has been massive debate over the appointment of Terry Venables as the Socceroo coach for the 1998 World Cup campaign 'pour jouer en France'. This debate can take a philosophical line - such as 'Should the coach be a true blue Aussie, a migrant, or, as it turns out, a 'hired gun'?'. Or economic - are we spending money we haven't got or is it a prudent investment?

The bottom line is that Terry Venables is here, and has arrived amid a massive amount of positive football-related publicity, something that the game can never reject. Every true lover of the game must now support the man and hope that at last we get to where we deserve - in France in June 1998.

I must warn here that nobody should be conned into thinking that getting past the fourth placed Asian team will be a stroll. Asian soccer is booming and full professional leagues are developing all the time. As well as the Asian big boys of South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Japan and China, don't forget that teams like Kuwait are pouring millions into their team, Indonesia

and Thailand are in long term development programs, the former Central Asian Soviet states such as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan are now in Asia, and of course if Iraq and Iran get organised they can be fierce opponents. Would you fancy an away leg in Baghdad?

The only debate now for the real soccer fan is who Venables will pick and how he'll play. We have to reject the cliché that it doesn't matter what system you play if you can't kick a ball, as we're dealing with elite world class footballers and the system of play or the 'shape' is often the vital ingredient to success at the highest level.

Venables has an excellent coaching record in two capacities. Firstly you never hear him being 'slagged' by players and many of his ex-players are vocal in his support. His record on the park is also top class. He 'coached', not managed (in England there's a difference between the two) QPR from Division Two to One.

Barcelona

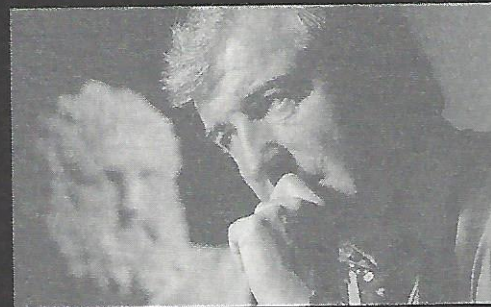
Then he did the big one. He arrived at Barcelona to take over from Cesar Menotti and performed the quite unusual act of getting rid of Diego Maradona and replacing him with Steve Archibald as the foreign player - some gamble! It paid off. After starting off with the ultimate Catalan victory, 3-0 over Real Madrid, he went on to win the league by 10 points in the 1984/5 season, the first Barcelona

championship victory in 11 years. The following year he took Barcelona to the European Cup final only to lose 0-2 on penalties to Steaua Bucharest.

His team that day played in a loose 4-3-3 system with the line up in Figure 1.

England

The next season he incurred the wrath of club president Nunez, like many a coach before, and was back to England to coach his beloved Spurs. Intermingled with an FA Cup victory over Nottingham Forest he had to look after Gazza and have a few battles with Alan Sugar. The Spurs years were turbulent but eventually public demand for him to be the coach of England was met by the English FA.



In his first match in charge Venables immediately showed his disdain for the long ball system of Graham Taylor. This system had been highly successful in short term league achievements, but was not only found wanting at international level, it was in many cases being blamed for the hindrance of player development at all levels. Australians will only have to recall the 1993 England Youth team in comparison to the Ghanaians and the Brazilians.

His team for the debut match against Denmark (a 1-0 victory) was as indicated in Figure 2.

Already three things were about to emerge. His teams were going to 'play football', his 'shape' was starting to emerge and he was going to show loyalty to key players.

A great deal of media hype began to emerge about the X-mas Tree formation based on the shape on paper of the team. The England team that eventually did so well in the Euro 96 competition lined up as in Figure 3.

This system relies on the typical English 'flat back four' playing in a type of zone. Ince is the defensive midfield player who acts as a 'windscreen wiper', Anderton and McManaman act as the wide players with the high work rate leaving the 'ball players' such as Gascoigne to support the strikers, Sheringham (who sits a little deep) and Shearer.

Player loyalty is often brought up in Venables' description, and despite injury and criticism he has stood by players such as Anderton and Sheringham and this loyalty has paid off. In a recent interview, Venables highlighted four young English players 'to look out for' - Campbell, Neville, Barmby and Redknapp. So if they are the type of players he 'fancies', have we Aussies of a similar ilk?

Australia

I believe we can expect the new Australian team to play with a back four and have athletic midfield players who are total footballers. It will be fascinating to see if any local players make the final XI. If they don't it will be sending an horrific message about our national league. We can forget about Task Forces on professionalism, for if it is seen that the best way to get into the national team is by playing overseas then Qantas will be having a field day.

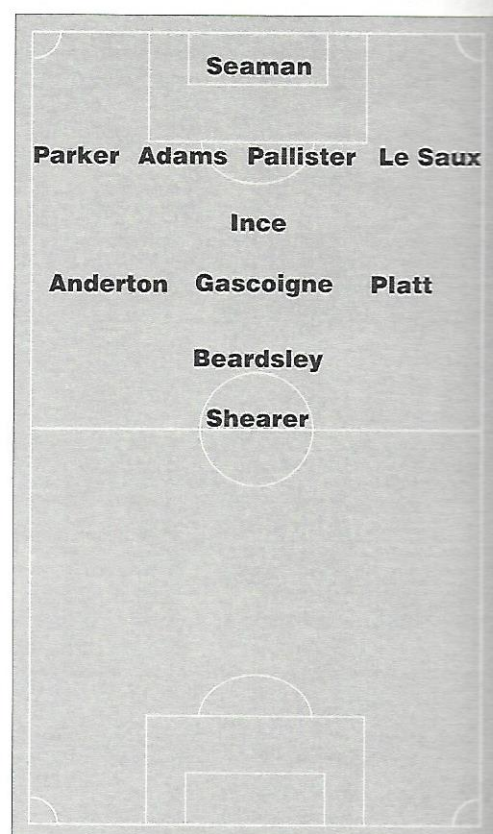
I suppose I can't philosophise about Venables and his tactics without putting my own neck on the line. The team is listed in 'the shape', with 1998 in mind. Apologies to Ivanovic (the best player in Australia), Tobin, Popovic, Blagojevic, Marth, Trajanovski and Farina (I still think he can play at this level), but I am going for an overseas-based side (see Figure 4).

No matter what team Venables picks or what system he chooses everyone will think they can pick a better team and play a different shape - we're all experts in hindsight. The main thing is all players, clubs, federations and commissioners must unite behind the common goal of getting to France. There is no doubt that the man in charge will really be 'in charge' ...and it's going to be an exciting 18 months.

**Figure 1
Barcelona 1986**



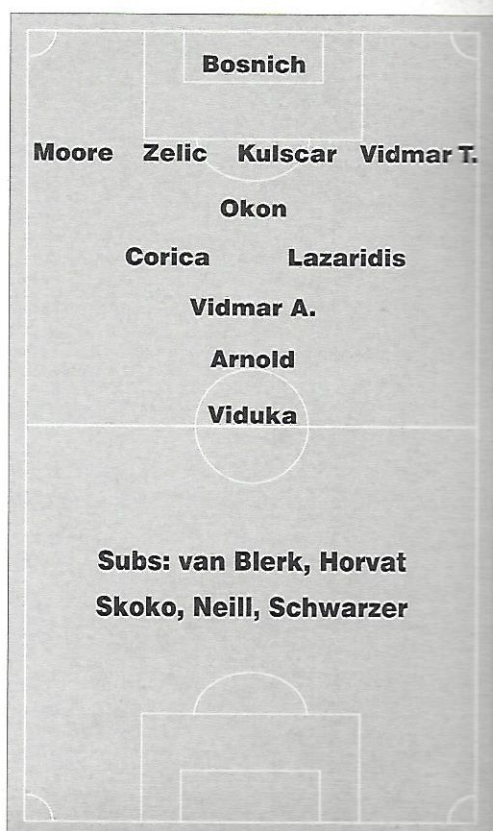
**Figure 2
England 1994**



**Figure 3
England at Euro 96**



**Figure 4
Australia at France 98**



**Subs: van Blerk, Horvat
Skoko, Neill, Schwarzer**

Ericsson Cup Statistics

compiled by Andrew Howe

Round 3 (deferred)

Wednesday, 6 November
Sydney United 3 (Kupresak 58, Zdrilic 64, Cvetko 90)
Melbourne Knights 1 (Kutlesovski 51)
Venue: Sydney Utd Sports Centre
Attendance: 3644
Referee: Brett Hugo

Round 5

Friday, 8 November
Newcastle Breakers 2 (Halpin 33, Sprod 46)
Canberra Cosmos 2 (Buljan 18, Koch 68)
Venue: Bruce Stadium
Attendance: 3107
Referee: Derek Crawford

Friday, 8 November
Wollongong City 1 (Harlock 57)
South Melbourne 1 (Trimboli 16)
Venue: Brandon Park
Attendance: 2906
Referee: Con Diomis

Saturday, 9 November
Brisbane Strikers 2 (Farina 28, Knipa 86)
Melbourne Knights 1 (T.Pondeljak 40)
Venue: Suncorp Stadium
Attendance: 5075
Referee: Eddie Lennie

Saturday, 9 November
Gippsland Falcons 1 (Palamaras 89)
West Adelaide 2 (Tsekinis 28, 59)
Venue: Falcons Park
Attendance: 2480
Referee: Mark Shield

Sunday, 10 November
Adelaide City 0
Marconi-Fairfield 1 (Harper 7)
Venue: Hindmarsh Stadium
Attendance: 4112
Referee: Brett Hugo

Sunday, 10 November
Collingwood Warriors 0
Perth Glory 0
Venue: Victoria Park
Attendance: 5504
Referee: Wayne Dade

Sunday, 10 November
Sydney United 2 (Popovic 60pen, 77pen)
UTS Olympic 1 (Sorras 65)
Venue: Sydney Utd Sports Centre
Attendance: 11381
Referee: Simon Micallef

Round 3 (deferred)

Wednesday, 13 November
Adelaide City 2 (Mennillo 13, Hassell 80)
South Melbourne 1 (Curcija 81)
Venue: Hindmarsh Stadium
Attendance: 2507
Referee: Eddie Lennie

Round 6

Saturday, 16 November
Canberra Cosmos 2 (Kelly 65pen, Watson 90)
Collingwood Warriors 2 (Taliadoros 30, MacNicol 49)
Venue: Bruce Stadium
Attendance: 2533
Referee: Mark Shield

Saturday, 16 November
Marconi-Fairfield 0
Brisbane Strikers 1 (Brown 26)
Venue: Marconi Stadium
Attendance: 5249
Referee: Simon Micallef

Saturday, 16 November
Perth Glory 2 (Kalogeracos 60, Strudwick 80)
Gippsland Falcons 3 (Krnecvic 21pen, 34, Marcina 25)
Venue: Perth Oval
Attendance: 6299
Referee: Andy Gorton

Sunday, 17 November
Melbourne Knights 0
Wollongong City 0
Venue: Knights Park
Attendance: 3174
Referee: Brett Hugo

Sunday, 17 November
South Melbourne 1 (Kelic 26)
Newcastle Breakers 0
Venue: Bob Jane Stadium
Attendance: 5335
Referee: Eugene Brazzale

Sunday, 17 November
UTS Olympic 1 (Augerinis 77)
Adelaide City 1 (Hassell 2)
Venue: Belmore Sports Ground
Attendance: 5216

Referee: Gerry Connolly

Sunday, 17 November
West Adelaide 2 (Cardozo 60, Slager 89)
Sydney United 3 (Zdrilic 21, Babic 39, Milicic 76)
Venue: Hindmarsh Stadium
Attendance: 4703
Referee: Eddie Lennie

Round 7

Friday, 22 November
Newcastle Breakers 1 (Zane 1)
Collingwood Warriors 1 (MacNicol 25)
Venue: Breakers Stadium
Attendance: 1371
Referee: Mark Shield

Saturday, 23 November
Brisbane Strikers 4 (Battistin 44, T.Cranney 63, Brown 71, Brayshaw 88)
UTS Olympic 1 (Saad 6)
Venue: Suncorp Stadium
Attendance: 5418
Referee: Eugene Brazzale

Saturday, 23 November
Gippsland Falcons 0
Canberra Cosmos 0
Venue: Falcons Park
Attendance: 2667
Referee: Jim Markovski

Saturday, 23 November
Sydney United 4 (Kupresak 36, Zdrilic 38, Marusic 43, Milicic 61)
Perth Glory 2 (Strudwick 11, Kalogeracos 72)
Venue: Sydney Utd Sports Centre
Attendance: 3450
Referee: Con Diomis

Sunday, 24 November
Adelaide City 1 (Mennillo 47)
West Adelaide 0
Venue: Hindmarsh Stadium
Attendance: 8914
Referee: Wayne Dade

Sunday, 24 November
South Melbourne 1 (Spink 60)
Melbourne Knights 1 (Z.Markovski 11)
Venue: Bob Jane Stadium
Attendance: 9631
Referee: Gerry Connolly

Sunday, 24 November
Wollongong City 3 (Sevin 1, Connolly 32, Lloyd 81)
Marconi-Fairfield 2 (Harper 31, Awaritefe 52)
Venue: Brandon Park
Attendance: 5518
Referee: Matthew Breeze

Round 8

Friday, 29 November
Melbourne Knights 2 (Simunic 46, Kutlesovski 62)
Newcastle Breakers 0
Venue: Knights Park
Attendance: 2794
Referee: Con Diomis

Saturday, 30 November
Canberra Cosmos 1 (Dee 23)
Sydney United 3 (Milicic 34, Rudan 57, Zdrilic 82)
Venue: Bruce Stadium
Attendance: 3500
Referee: Wayne Dade

Saturday, 30 November
Marconi-Fairfield 0
South Melbourne 1 (Trimboli 87)
Venue: Marconi Stadium
Attendance: 4972
Referee: Brett Hugo

Sunday, 1 December
Collingwood Warriors 0
Gippsland Falcons 1 (Krnecvic 13)
Venue: Victoria Park
Attendance: 3110
Referee: Eugene Brazzale

Sunday, 1 December
Perth Glory 2 (Wilkinson 84, Despotovski 90)
Adelaide City 1 (Tobin 38)
Venue: Perth Oval
Attendance: 9765
Referee: Eddie Lennie

Sunday, 1 December
UTS Olympic 1 (Tome 44)
Wollongong City 1 (Connolly 44)
Venue: Belmore Sports Ground
Attendance: 6222
Referee: Simon Micallef

Sunday, 1 December
West Adelaide 0
Brisbane Strikers 0
Venue: Hindmarsh Stadium
Attendance: 3977
Referee: Gerry Connolly

Round 9

Friday, 6 December

Newcastle Breakers 2 (own goal 18, Wilson 50)
Gippsland Falcons 2 (Krnecvic 15, Duric 66)
Venue: Breakers Stadium
Attendance: 2231
Referee: Simon Micallef

Friday, 6 December
Wollongong City 2 (Harlock 24, Joseski 43)
West Adelaide 0
Venue: Brandon Park
Attendance: 3948
Referee: Greg Leverton

Saturday, 7 December
Brisbane Strikers 1 (Battistin 87)
Perth Glory 5 (Wilkinson 14, Despotovski 51, 68, Kalogeracos 53, Strudwick 57)
Venue: Suncorp Stadium
Attendance: 4028
Referee: Mark Shield

Sunday, 8 December
Adelaide City 1 (Tobin 62)
Canberra Cosmos 0
Venue: Hindmarsh Stadium
Attendance: 3323
Referee: Barry Panella

Sunday, 8 December
Melbourne Knights 1 (Simunic 36pen)
Marconi-Fairfield 2 (Babic 70, Zoric 80)
Venue: Knights Park
Attendance: 3393
Referee: Eugene Brazzale

Sunday, 8 December
South Melbourne 4 (Trimboli 11, Orlie 32, Panopoulos 38, Spink 78)
UTS Olympic 1 (Trajanovski 36)
Venue: Bob Jane Stadium
Attendance: 8896
Referee: Eddie Lennie

Sunday, 8 December
Sydney United 7 (Zdrilic 13, 16, 38, 80, Rudan 42, Moric 56, Milicic 89)
Collingwood Warriors 0
Venue: Sydney Utd Sports Centre
Attendance: 5451
Referee: Brett Hugo

Round 10

Saturday, 14 December
Canberra Cosmos 1 (Kelly 30pen)
Brisbane Strikers 4 (Hunter 3pen, 49pen, Farina 60, Brown 65)
Venue: Bruce Stadium
Attendance: 2525
Referee: Greg Leverton

Saturday, 14 December
Gippsland Falcons 1 (E.Masi 57)
Sydney United 2 (Enes 28, Milicic 83)
Venue: Falcons Park
Attendance: 2579
Referee: Eugene Brazzale

Saturday, 14 December
Marconi-Fairfield 2 (Maloney 20, Zoric 58)
Newcastle Breakers 1 (Halpin 67)
Venue: Marconi Stadium
Attendance: 4111
Referee: Jim Markovski

Saturday, 14 December
Perth Glory 3 (Strudwick 1, Despotovski 25, 35)
Wollongong City 1 (Naumovski 29)
Venue: Perth Oval
Attendance: 10781
Referee: Eddie Lennie

Sunday, 15 December
Collingwood Warriors 1 (Taliadoros 42)
Adelaide City 3 (Mennillo 33, 89, Brooks 43)
Venue: Victoria Park
Attendance: 3655
Referee: Mark Shield

Sunday, 15 December
UTS Olympic 1 (Ciantar 59)
Melbourne Knights 0
Venue: Belmore Sports Ground
Attendance: 4834
Referee: Brett Hugo

Sunday, 15 December
West Adelaide 0
South Melbourne 2 (Orlic 20, Kelic 76)
Venue: Hindmarsh Stadium
Attendance: 3972
Referee: Wayne Dade

Round 11

Friday, 20 December
Newcastle Breakers 3 (Pryce 68, Zane 70, Bennett 74)
Sydney United 1
Venue: Breakers Stadium
Attendance: 3832
Referee: Matthew Breeze

Friday, 20 December
Wollongong City 2 (Perinich 50, Horsley 81)

Canberra Cosmos 1 (Lemezina 81)
Venue: Brandon Park
Attendance: 3467
Referee: Brett Hugo

Saturday, 21 December
Brisbane Strikers 5 (Farina 6, 49, Battistin 24, Slater 79, Wehrman 83)
Collingwood Warriors 2 (Vlahos 19, 36)
Venue: Suncorp Stadium
Attendance: 4195
Referee: Simon Micallef

Saturday, 21 December
Marconi-Fairfield 5 (Babic 11, 74, Awaritefe 32, Harper 65, Maloney 90)
UTS Olympic 1 (Tome 60)
Venue: Marconi Stadium
Attendance: 10331
Referee: Gerry Connolly

Saturday, 21 December
South Melbourne 1 (Coveny 63)
Perth Glory 0
Venue: Bob Jane Stadium
Attendance: 7896
Referee: Eugene Brazzale

Sunday, 22 December
Adelaide City 4 (Mustano 46, 53, Brooks 51, 69)
Gippsland Falcons 1 (Foy 12)
Venue: Hindmarsh Stadium
Attendance: 3789
Referee: Wayne Dade

Sunday, 22 December
Melbourne Knights 4 (Kutlesovski 7, 89, Simunic 44pen, T.Pondeljak 77)
West Adelaide 0
Venue: Knights Park
Attendance: 3970
Referee: Mark Shield

Round 3 (deferred)

Monday, 23 December
Collingwood Warriors 0
UTS Olympic 0
Venue: Victoria Park
Attendance: 1000
Referee: Eugene Brazzale

Round 12

Saturday, 28 December
Canberra Cosmos 1 (Dee 20)
South Melbourne 0
Venue: Bruce Stadium
Attendance: 2327
Referee: Simon Micallef

Saturday, 28 December
Gippsland Falcons 1 (Giminez 68)
Brisbane Strikers 0
Venue: Falcons Park
Attendance: 2581
Referee: Matthew Breeze

Saturday, 28 December
Perth Glory 3 (McVittie 34, Kalogeracos 40, Miller 90)
Melbourne Knights 2 (A.Cervinski 53, 60)
Venue: Perth Oval
Attendance: 14757
Referee: Andy Gorton

Sunday, 29 December
Collingwood Warriors 1 (Cerrachio 30)
Wollongong City 1 (Joseski 8)
Venue: Victoria Park
Attendance: 2987

Ericsson Cup ladder as at 5 January 1997

| | Pl. | W | D | L | F | A | Pts |
|----------------------|-----|---|---|---|----|----|-----|
| Sydney United | 13 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 35 | 19 | 29 |
| Brisbane Strikers | 13 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 30 | 14 | 29 |
| Perth Glory | 13 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 30 | 22 | 22 |
| South Melbourne | 13 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 18 | 11 | 21 |
| Wollongong City | 13 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 21 | 16 | 21 |
| Adelaide City | 13 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 16 | 11 | 20 |
| Marconi-Fairfield | 13 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 20 | 20 | 17 |
| UTS Olympic | 13 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 18 | 24 | 16 |
| West Adelaide | 13 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 18 | 25 | 16 |
| Melbourne Knights | 13 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 14 | 16 | 13 |
| Newcastle Breakers | 14 | 2 | 7 | 5 | 22 | 26 | 13 |
| Gippsland Falcons | 13 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 14 | 23 | 13 |
| Collingwood Warriors | 13 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 13 | 26 | 12 |
| Canberra Cosmos | 14 | 1 | 5 | 8 | 13 | 29 | 8 |

Leading Scorers

| | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|----|
| David Zdrilic | Sydney United | 12 |
| Bobby Despotovski | Perth Glory | 9 |
| Ante Milicic | Sydney United | 7 |
| Frank Farina | Brisbane Strikers | 7 |
| Norman Tome | UTS Olympic | 7 |
| Rod Brown | Brisbane Strikers | 6 |
| Paul Strudwick | Perth Glory | 6 |
| Vasili Kalogeracos | Perth Glory | 6 |
| Jason Bennett | Newcastle Breakers | 5 |
| Matthew Horsley | Wollongong City | 5 |
| Nick Joseski | Wollongong City | 5 |
| Eddie Krnecvic | Gippsland Falcons | 5 |
| Kris Trajanovski | UTS Olympic | 5 |
| Jim Tsekinis | West Adelaide | 5 |

Destiny calls for United

Sydney United's history in the national league has been marked by regular finals appearances, but until now the championship has eluded them.

This could be the breakthrough season for the Pumas, though, as MICHAEL COCKERILL reports.

So near and yet so far. This is the story of Sydney United – a club which has produced more internationals than any other – but one which has failed to land the biggest prize of all, the Ericsson Cup.

By right, of course, the Pumas should have landed the trophy by now. A stream of quality players have flowed through their ranks, and after a period of insecurity in the early 1990s they have re-established themselves off the field as well.

Indeed since joining the national league when it was expanded to 24 clubs in 1984, Sydney United have

generally been there or thereabouts. They have figured in the finals series in six out of 13 seasons, with the crowning glory their grand final appearance in 1988. The Pumas' lowest point was a 12th place in season 1991-92, while they actually won the minor premiership in 1986 when the league was split into two divisions.

Yet a club with such rich potential has failed to cross the threshold when it matters, and this sorry situation continues to be a cause of great angst. The bridesmaid, but never the bride.

It is a scenario well known to sister club Melbourne Knights, but as we know the Knights finally shook the monkey off their backs by winning the last two championships. Sydney United have taken heart, and there is an understandable optimism that this is the season when it will all change for the better.

Certainly the Pumas have bolted out of the blocks – scoring goals with almost ridiculous ease and sweeping aside such notable opponents as Melbourne Knights, UTS Olympic and Marconi-Fairfield in the process.

But coach Branko Culina remains cautious, not wishing to inflate expectations as the business end of the season gets underway. Certainly the loss of influential skipper Tony Popovic to Japanese club Sanfrece could hardly have been more untimely, while by the time you read this the persistent rumours that goalkeeper Zeljko Kalac could also be on his way may have gained substance.

Whatever transpires, the hope of the Pumas' supporters is that the club, as a whole, will have learnt from past mistakes. President Ivan Simic assures that this is the case.

"Look, you have to be ready to win a title, and maybe that wasn't the case in the past," he says.

"I strongly believe we are ready, off the park as well. And when we do break through, it will well and truly establish this club.

"With the team we have, and the age of most of the players, there is every reason to believe we could go on and win two or three titles straight."

Yet if titles can be won by design, luck can play a part too. Let us not forget that

the Pumas had one hand on the trophy in the 1988 grand final against Marconi before a refereeing decision which is disputed to this day snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

The Pumas were leading 2-1 when a long ball was played out of the Marconi defence in the dying moments of the match, and Frank Farina gave chase. Pumas defender Mark Jones sprinted back in cover, and there was a tangle of arms and legs. Was it a foul? Was it inside or outside the box? The Sydney United players turned anxiously towards referee Chris Baimbridge, and their worse fears were realised.

Penalty Marconi, with less than a minute left in extra time. The epic battle – which had seen both teams reduced to 10 men after Ivan Petkovic and Gerry Gomez were marched midway through the second half – had a sting in its tail. After 120 minutes of pulsating football, the issue remained unresolved.

Marconi striker Zlatko Nastevski ignored the rising tension as he stepped up to the spot, and calmly converted the kick. The final whistle blew moments later, and in the end the title had to be decided by penalties.

And as day rapidly began to turn into night, the old Marconi warhorse, Tony Henderson, held the destiny of the championship in his hands. It was his 296th and final game for the Stallions, and despite the significance of the occasion he was happy to accept the responsibility.

Goalkeeper Anthony Franken duly went the wrong way, and Henderson was left to savour the distinction of winning the championship with his final kick in the national league.

It was a fairytale ending for Marconi, and an emotional moment for Henderson. To this day the match is regarded as the best grand final in the competition's history. It was the first to decide the title, and it came just before the exodus of Australian players to overseas clubs.

Gracing the Parramatta Stadium pitch that afternoon were a glittering array of genuine stars – Farina, Henderson, Nastevski, Peter Katholos, Tom McCulloch and Ian Gray for Marconi; Graham Arnold, Robbie Slater, Manis Lamond, Alan Hunter

and Vedran Rozic for Sydney United.

The standard of the league was at its zenith, and if Sydney United had some consolation it was that they contributed heavily to the best grand final of them all.

But the solace was fleeting, and as the years have marched on the club has, in many ways, still to recover from the disappointment. In the eight seasons since Sydney United has never come as close again. And the frustration has only been compounded by three losing appearances in the finals over the past three seasons.

But underneath the results, the momentum has been steadily growing. In the 1980s, Sydney United had a reputation as a club trying to buy its way to a title. A succession of imported players and coaches – almost exclusively from Croatia – were allied to the biggest names available on the domestic market. The game plan was basically short-term.

Over the past three years, however, the focus has shifted towards a longer view. The current first team is the end result of a steady rebuilding program based around promoting the club's enormous wealth of junior talent. As a result, the Pumas now boast one of the youngest teams in the Ericsson Cup, but at the same time one of the most experienced.

It is a perfect symmetry, and the timing is right. While nothing can be taken for granted, it would be a major surprise if the Pumas fell away from here. And if the ultimate goal – the holy grail of a first ever title – does find its way to Edensor Park, then the club's renaissance will be complete.

Sydney United's national league history:

1984: 6th place (northern division);

1985: 2nd (northern division) – lost semi-

final to Sydney City; 1986: 1st (northern

division) – lost preliminary final to UTS

Olympic; 1987: 5th; 1988: 2nd – lost grand

final to Marconi-Fairfield 5-4 on penalties;

1989: 7th; 1989-90: 7th; 1990-91: 7th;

1991-92: 12th; 1992-93: 7th; 1993-94: 3rd

– lost elimination semi-final to Adelaide

City; 1994-95: 3rd – lost minor semi-final

to South Melbourne; 1995-96: 6th – lost

minor semi-final to Adelaide City.

Tony Popovic will become Australia's first player to set foot in the yen-saturated J-League in early February. Optus Vision's Robert Wheatley spoke to the 23 year old Socceroo stopper on the eve of his historic transfer.

'Konnich iwa' was the message on Eddie Thomson's answering machine during the negotiations surrounding his eventual appointment as new head coach of Sanfrece Hiroshima in Japan. The recorded message for his first down under signing, Tony Popovic, however, could be encapsulated in one phrase – opportunity knocks.

Following a brief but unsuccessful trial with Leeds United, where Popovic admits he didn't fit in, the overwhelmingly lucrative offer to join Sanfrece under the former national coach's tutelage was irresistible.

"I left the country because it was a big opportunity to be a full-time player in the professional J-League and financially it was too good to say no," Popovic enthused.

The classy defender freely admits his move is significant.

"It's a start to fulfil my ambition. I don't know what it will be like. I'm hoping to stay there for two years, then play in Europe."

The capture of Popovic represents a ready-made solution at his new headquarters.

Sanfrece Hiroshima completed the 30 match home and away season conceding an unacceptable 60 goals with a negative 24 goal difference.

Foreigners' names fill the top goal-scorers list with the exception of prolific local product Kazuyoshi Miura who bagged 23 goals for seventh placed Verdy Kawasaki, suggesting Popovic will have some big name opponents to shadow.

Attendances at matches fluctuate from 11 to 21 thousand, extra-time was a normal part of the 1996 season and penalties, a Popovic favourite, were used to resolve matches still drawn after extra-time.

But will the 16 team league that attracts ex-European based goalscorers and creative midfielders close to the end of their careers be a true test for the youthful,

Popovic J-league bound

commanding Popovic? Understandably, Popovic believes it will.

"I will be playing against nippy players every week. I know that will make me quicker and Thommo is going to play football. It will teach me how to defend better and I'm also looking to improve my right foot."

His former club coach at Sydney United, Branko Culina, has a more sobering outlook.

"Tony has undeniable qualities which are not transferable to the J-League immediately. What he lacks in speed he makes up for with vision, his desire is unquestionable but he is not a pretty player," concluded the Ericsson Cup's leading coach.

"His best chance was English football. He oozes talent and has more ability than they have."

Culina illustrates his former charge's talent when relating an anecdote. During Popovic's short stay at Elland Road, midway into a session, Howard Wilkinson (former Leeds manager) stopped the play. The gaffer's message was direct.

"Don't look around for a passing option, get the ball in there and hit a striker."

Popovic will be remembered on the local scene as a surging ball-playing stopper who regularly injected life into the Pumas' attack. Calculated distribution has also been a close ally in his repertoire.

Culina is cool about the J-League standard. "In analysing the Japanese scene, if you take away the imports it's pretty ordinary. Our national team and under-20s do it easily over them."

Former Socceroo boss Frank Arok is typically pragmatic in his assessment.

'Yes, the Japanese game is very fast.

He (Popovic) will have problems in the first couple of months but it will improve his awareness - you can't blame the kid for going. His sheer size will do the trick," stressed Arok.

The experienced Arok also notes with a hint of caution the career prospects attached to an immature competition.

"The benefits of big money are there. He will finally capitalise on the move. Clubs do not buy from the J-League. Established nations like Belgium, Croatia and France provide the transition to bigger leagues."

Popovic's soon-to-be-adopted new home in Hiroshima operates with a ceiling of five foreigners on the books, three of whom can be named in the starting 11.

Originally in two minds about the move, Poppa maintains a strong desire to remain closely connected with the national team. With the Socceroos' World Cup campaign imminent, the big number four will be released for all matches with Eddie Thomson's blessing.

Venables' planned series of European-based matches involving Aussies already on the continent will precede the official qualification matches in June.

Ironically Japan looms as a likely fourth-placed Asian opponent, assuming Australia progresses successfully through Oceania.

Popovic then becomes perfectly placed to fill a role in France 1998 and complete his asset-rich move into Asia, an outcome that would not see him lost to the Australian soccer public he has served so well.

How soccer lost the Waugh

Steve Waugh is the number one-ranked batsman in the world and a brilliant all-rounder. But there was a time when many thought he was headed for Soccerroo stardom, as IAN HAMILTON reveals.

The fact that Steve Waugh played in representative teams throughout his formative years after taking up the game at age six doesn't really surprise. Nothing more than expected, a typical early form guide for a future test cricketer, a batsman who at his peak is regarded by many as the best in the world: NSW Primary Schools, Australian Schoolboys, club second grade at 17.

But these early credits to Waugh's name are for soccer. Sure, he did the rep thing in cricket too, but an analysis of Steve Waugh, the junior sportsman, reads like a Boy's Own Annual schoolboy dream; "In which sport will I choose to become a superstar?"

Multiply the dream by two because twin brother Mark's record is virtually the same. The Waugh twins both played soccer and cricket year in, year out as kids, not to mention tennis and other sports thrown in.

But it was Steve who just might have gone on with soccer with both sports garnering equal attention until age 17. "Mark had made his decision a few years before I did and was always going to choose cricket," Waugh told Soccer Australia recently.

In fact, Waugh's most memorable foot-balling moment was scoring a goal lauded by Johnny Warren in his newspaper column at the time amid predictions of a star on the rise. Well, he was right about that.

By age 17, Steve had made every post a winner in junior soccer and cricket, playing in all the schoolboy rep sides in both sports

and playing grade cricket for the Bankstown club in summer and state league second and third grade soccer in winter.

Lee Sterrey, currently Marconi Fairfield's youth team coach, says he first knew of Steve and Mark when they were both in the state primary schools soccer team and got to know them throughout their teenage years. Sterrey went on to play state league and national league first grade for Sydney Croatia, Blacktown City and Marconi Fairfield.

When the Waughs were 17, Sterrey, four years older than the twins, introduced them to his then-state league club South Sydney Croatia (later Sydney Croatia, now Sydney United) where they ended up playing second grade.

In Sterrey's words it "was to help them earn a bit of money", an idea not without its irony considering how things panned out.

"Steve was an attacking central midfielder, very quick and very sharp. Mark was more a defender," Sterrey remembers.

The tenacious, competitive approach for which Steve Waugh has become known at the highest levels of cricket would have taken him a long way in soccer too, it seems.

"Steve could have made the grade, no doubt about it. He would have eventually played at national league level, and probably could have made the Soccerroos. Whatever he does, he does full on - his commitment is super," Sterrey testifies.

But here's a more telling yardstick by which to measure his potential: At 15 and 16, Steve Waugh was playing for the Auburn club in western Sydney and holding down a spot in the side comfortably while a young Robbie Slater struggled. Slater is on record as saying the young Steve Waugh was a very useful soccer player and has

little doubt he could have made it to the top had he kept with it.

The coach was Len Qusted, a legend in Sydney soccer circles going on to coach Blacktown City. It seems he saw more potential in Waugh than Slater, at least early on.

"Len was the best coach I ever played under. He's the coach that made Robbie Slater, I reckon," Waugh says.

"Nearly every training session he'd tell Robbie to go home, that he didn't want him there, but he kept staying and kept trying and that made him the player he is. He was a late developer as a soccer player but once he got to 16 or 17, he really took off. He was always very determined.

"Maybe Len thought he wasn't a good listener or maybe he was just trying to toughen him up - Robbie may disagree with that, I'm not sure."

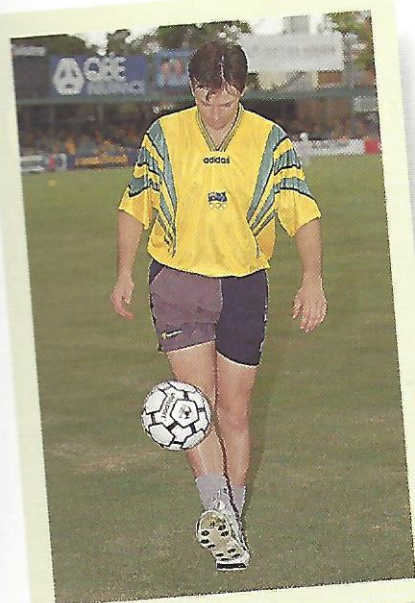
But back to that decision. Why the attraction of willow and not the World Cup, or Wimbledon for that matter?

"Both sports were coming to a stage where I had to take one more seriously than the other and the first grade coach at Croatia wanted to play me but he said 'Look, I'm not going to pick you in the first team unless you give up cricket training', so he forced me to make a choice."

"The Croatians didn't exactly know what cricket was all about. Then at the end of the season they didn't pay me what they owed me."

Steve claims, and it's confirmed by Sterrey, that Sydney Croatia reneged on paying the players in the lower grades at the end of the 1982 season.

To this day, Sterrey knows just how much the Waughs are owed - \$350 each - Mark and



Whether Roger haven't let Sterrey forget.

"It left a bad taste in my mouth the way things worked out, them not paying the players in the lower grades," Steve said.

While being left out of pocket didn't help, Steve says he would have chosen cricket anyway.

"I made the Australian schoolboys (soccer, that is) and by then I guess I had to make a choice between cricket and soccer. By that stage I was in the Australian under-19 cricket team and we toured around and I really enjoyed it."

And so cricket it was that won Steve Waugh.

"It was always seen as our national number one sport that all Australian kids played. I grew up at a time when Australian soccer was too fragmented. It was almost a war every time you played an opposition side, so I really was not enjoying it as much as I was playing cricket."

Waugh thinks this factor held the game back, not only for him, but generally in Australia. Nothing new there. Perhaps a few hundred thousand kids other than Steve Waugh were turned away from soccer over the past three decades for similar reasons. It's frightening to think just how many laughs Australian soccer may have lost over the years.

Tell him things have changed since then,



as most involved in Australian soccer would like to believe, and recent history lets you go down. News that Johnny Warren had been receiving death threats makes you wonder, Waugh says.

"I wouldn't change anything if I had the choice again."

Sterrey was also a grade cricketer at Bankstown and received the same ultimatum from the same soccer club a few years earlier, finally opting for soccer because it paid more - but not before he considered continuing grade cricket under a false name after being fined \$1000 by Sydney Croatia for thumping leather with willow on the weekend.

On the latest issues to divide Australian

soccer, Waugh supports the appointment of Terry Venables as national coach and the involvement of people like David Hill and George Negus in administration.

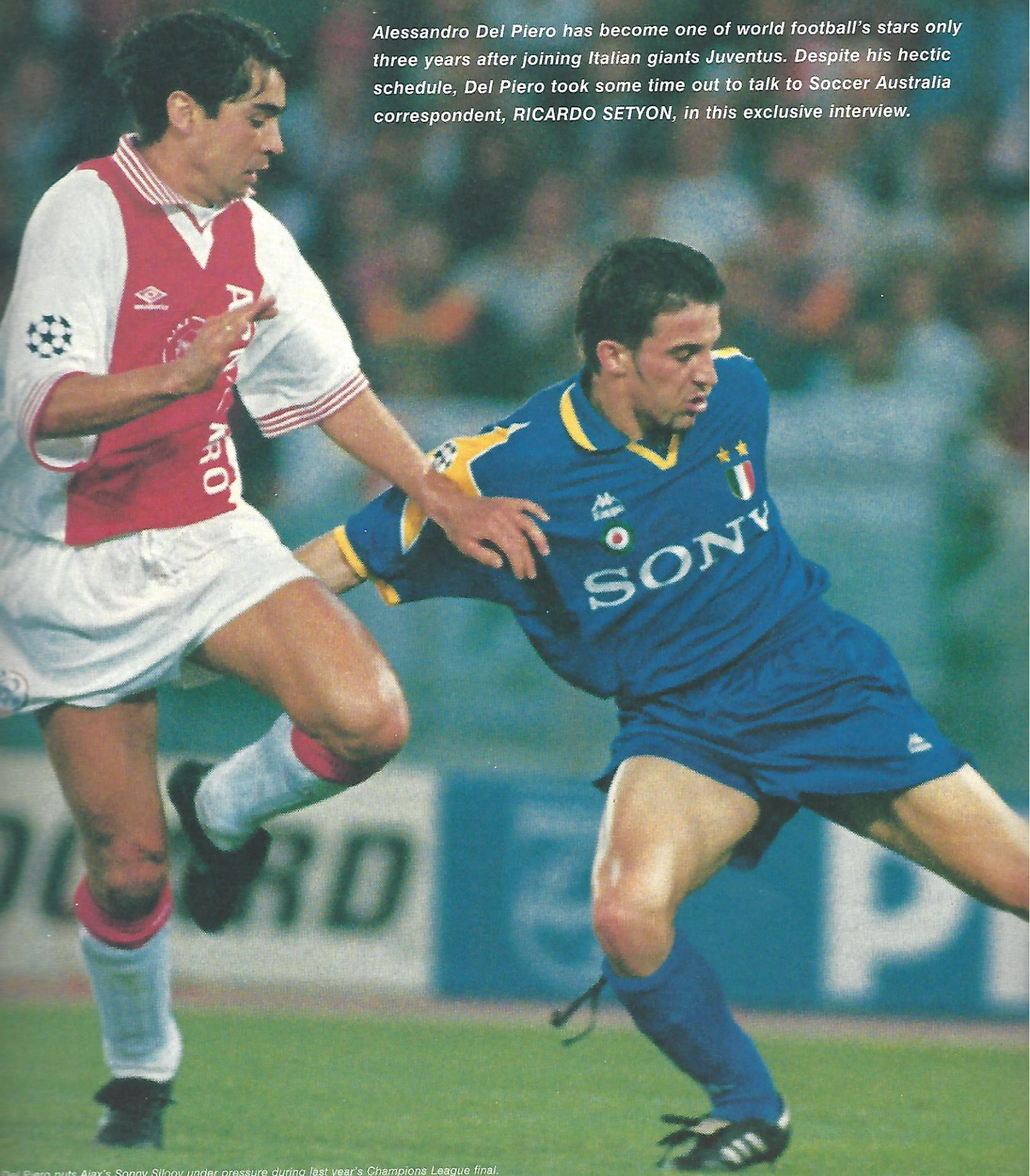
Playing cricket full-time for nine months of the year doesn't leave much time for playing or watching soccer these days. He doesn't follow the Ericsson Cup closely, but hasn't lost sight of the world game altogether.

"We always take a soccer ball away on tour with us, like on the last tour of Pakistan."

The word from Steve is that brother Mark and NSW batsman Michael Bevan are the keenest soccer players among plenty in the national team that like a kick around.

Juve's little pr

Alessandro Del Piero has become one of world football's stars only three years after joining Italian giants Juventus. Despite his hectic schedule, Del Piero took some time out to talk to Soccer Australia correspondent, RICARDO SETYON, in this exclusive interview.



Del Piero puts Ajax's Sonny Silooy under pressure during last year's Champions League final.

The story begins in Brazil. Since the reign of Pele, the king of soccer, there has been only one player considered worthy of being called a 'prince'. As with Pele, Zico was a midfielder, and also like Pele, Zico carried the name of Brazil to glory worldwide.

The story moves on to Europe, more specifically to France. In this country soccer fans had had 20 years of broken dreams since Copa and Fontaine took the French to the semi-finals of the 1958 World Cup. Two decades on and a certain Michel Platini brings France into the top echelons of world football. In 1986 he leads his countrymen to their second World Cup semi-final appearance in four years and Platini is named 'the new prince' in Europe.

Another 10 years passed before another phenomenon appears on the football fields of Europe. He's known by many names - 'Ale' at home, 'Alex' by his team-mates. But when he's labelled 'Il Principino', things become clearer. 'Il Principino', or 'The Little Prince', is now being compared to Zico and Platini.

'The Little Prince' is Alessandro Del Piero, and he has much in common with the Brazilian and French superstars. Like Zico and Platini, Del Piero wears the number 10. The three princes played for clubs sporting black and white stripes. Zico wooed the fans at Udinese, while Platini and Del Piero charmed the supporters of Juventus of Turin, so all three have walked the stage of the world's top domestic competition, the Italian Serie A.

Zico played three World Cups, was sports minister of Brazil, owns a soccer team in his native country and is the manager of the Japanese champions, Kashima Antlers. Platini was a star in World Cups, coached the French national team, became a television star, and is now the chairman of the organising committee of the France'98 World Cup. While the other two princes of world soccer are having successful careers off the field, Del Piero is just beginning to make an impact within the four white lines of the football ground.

Title after title in only six seasons in professional soccer, Del Piero has just

celebrated his 22nd birthday. An idol all over the world, his achievements are extraordinary. Second to none in Italian football, Del Piero has managed to do something no-one would have thought possible - he's made the fans forget Roberto Baggio, the world's best player in 1994.

December 1996 saw Del Piero at the top of his game and on top of the world as his winning goal secured the Intercontinental Cup for the European champions. Soccer Australia caught up with the Italian superstar - who as a youngster even slept with a soccer ball beside him - as he looked back on surely the most extraordinary year of his life.

Q *Let me see - how do you start an interview with a player who wears the number 10 shirt for Europe's champion team, and who's just scored the winning goal and been named man of the match in the Intercontinental Cup?*

A Well, as far as my experience goes, generally people ask where and when I was born.

Q *No, first I have to ask - how many interviews have you given over the last few months?*

A It's amazing. I think I must have given around 500 interviews. People are always waiting for me, asking the same questions. Some people forget I'm a soccer player and think I'm a prime minister or president. Interviews, photos, television cameras...and this is just the beginning.

Q *What's your opinion of the press, and what sort of relationship do you have with journalists? You seem to be one of the most easy-going, relaxed players on the European scene...*

A My parents, my brother and my best friends always taught me good values. In my relationship with the press, I believe that as long as I am respected, I will respect. The press can criticise as long as they do it in an appropriate way. I have no enemies in the press and I know that it's through the journalist that my opinions, thoughts and emotions will reach the most important people in soccer - the supporters.

Q *Your family is really important to you, isn't it?*

A Nobody deserves recognition more than my family for what I am today. In all matters, as a player and as a man, my family showed me the way and taught me all they know. My father Gino, my mother Bruna and my brother Stefano were, and are, my best friends and teachers. Each one of them helped me in different ways to realise my dream of becoming a soccer player.

Q *Before you start telling stories about each of them, let's finally get it straight: who exactly is Del Piero?*

A I thought you'd forgotten that question. I was born Alessandro, on the 9th of November 1974 in the small city of Conegliano, which is in the northern Italian province of Treviso. By the time I was nine months old I already liked playing with a soccer ball. Today I am 1.73 metres tall, I weigh 71 kilos and most of time I'm with my family in a street called Borgo Saccon, in the very small city of San Vendemiano. Anything else?

Q *Yes, now let's hear about the influence of your family.*

A My mother Bruna always listened to me patiently about all the promises I made about becoming a big star in soccer. My father Gino was the one who supported my dreams, told me how proud he was of me, and he taught me how to be a man and to respect other men.

He worked for ENEL, the Italian national electric company. To show you how much he wanted me to go on and play, he even built a whole electric system, full of small lamps, and even four wooden poles, in the small pitch behind my house.

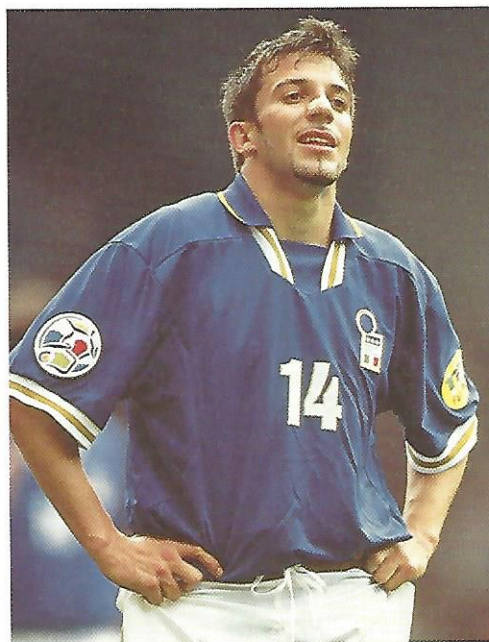
I still remember him climbing the poles, fixing the wires, checking the lamps, while me and my little friends were fascinated and anxious. All of us just sitting on the ground waiting to be the only kids around who could play at night, thanks to the lights we had.

Q *But it was your brother Stefano who had the biggest influence on you?*

Yes, definitely. Stefano was a good player himself. He played in the Sampdoria

youth team for two years, together with Ganz (a striker these days with Inter Milan) and Gambaro (now with Milan). Coincidentally the coach of his team was Marcello Lippi, my coach at Juve today.

Lippi decided to send my brother home and he was very disappointed. He was always my best friend, and he made me believe that I was firstly a man, and only after, a soccer player. He, together with my parents, showed me the concrete values of life, and not the superfluous ones.



Alessandro Del Piero during one of his appearances for the Italian national team (Gli Azzurri).

Q *As a kid, were you a 'winner'?*

A I always wanted to win. I always tried to play in the same team as my brother, and everyone always wanted me in their team. Once we played me and my brother against everybody.

I always broke everything in the house and around it with the ball. When I started to get bigger, I loved to try to play what I called 'exact soccer'. I used to shout to my friends, "You want to see how I can turn the lights on by kicking the ball?". And then I would kick it softly and I always succeeded in turning the light on.

I also used to put little things in a wall, you know, like in western movies when people shoot coins or bottles. I hit all sorts of things from quite a distance, always using my feet.

Q *How did you begin in soccer?*

A It was in that small team of my 'paese',

San Vendemiano. I started when I was seven years old and when I was nearly 14 I signed up with Padova. Professionally, my first game was for Padova against Messina on March 15, 1991, in Serie B.

My first goal came more than a year later on November 22, 1992, for Padova against Ternana. After that second season in Serie B with Padova I was bought by Juventus.

Q *Were you always a striker?*

A No. I used to play a lot in midfield and also in defence. But my natural position is as a striker, in the middle, just behind the player who's furthest forward.

Q *And at Juventus, where there is Amoroso, Padovano and Vieri, your space in the front line is relatively small, isn't it?*

A Yes, all those players you've mentioned are strikers, and Lippi allows me to move a little bit everywhere around the forward line. This way, I have the freedom to create more and help the team more.

Q *It's an important question, because the position you play at Juventus created a lot of misunderstanding between yourself and former Italian national coach, Arrigo Sacchi.*

A Sacchi made me play in a totally different way in the national team to the way I'm used to with Juventus. In the Italian team I'm more fixed, behind the forward line, with a lot less mobility.

Q *Your performances so far have been outstanding for Juventus and quite poor for Italy.*

A I believe so. You see, I've played 11 matches for Italy and we've had eight victories, two draws and only one defeat. In those matches I only scored two goals (against Wales and Belgium, both in 1996). With Sacchi, there was a greater concern about marking than there was about creating moves.

Q *At the same time, you've scored 30 goals for Juventus in only three seasons.*

A Exactly. I haven't counted the goals, but I know I've scored many more than in the national team. So far, my style in the national team has been totally different to what it was with Juventus.

continued on page



Soccer 1997

Exclusive official ball supplier to Soccer Australia Ericsson Cup and English Premier League.



*Licensed
ball of:*

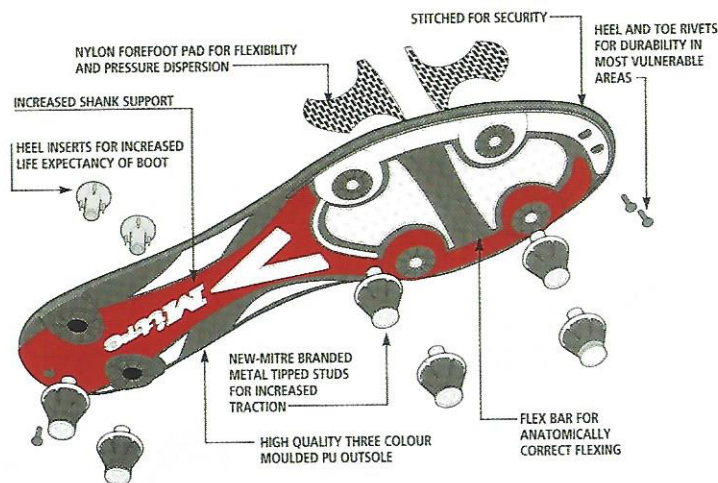




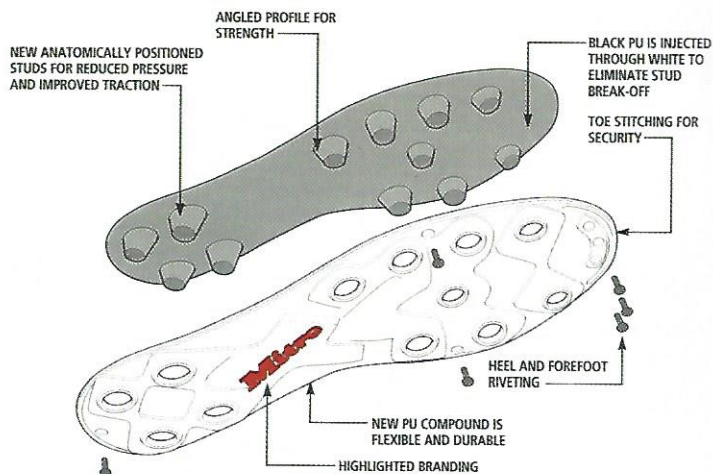
Mitre's Commitment to Soccer

In response to the advice of players, coaches and physiotherapists, Mitre, using computer-aided design, have developed two new outsoles; THE "ESPRIT" and THE "RAFALE"

The Espirit Outsole



The Rafale Outsole



The Ultimax

With over 100 years of experience the Mitre brand has become famous the world over for the finest quality soccer balls. So it is hardly surprising that Mitre balls are the natural choice of many international soccer leagues, such as The FA Premier League, The Scottish Football League, The Football Association of Wales, Soccer New Zealand and the USA Major League Soccer.

In Australia, acknowledgment of Mitre's superb quality and performance has been given by the fact that it is the exclusive official ball of Soccer Australia and the Ericsson Cup as well as a licensed ball supplier to Soccer New South Wales, the Queensland Soccer Federation, The Victorian Soccer Federation and the South Australian Soccer Federation.

Developed with assistance from Europe's top players, teams and coaches, Mitre have produced a new ball - THE ULTIMAX.

The new hand stitched, balanced Ultimax features a supple synthetic substrate that is bonded to a soft but durable surface. The superior aerodynamics of the Mitre Ultimax allows the ball to fly as straight as an arrow and be curled and bent precisely by those players with skills to do so.

Launched in the UK in August 1995, the Ultimax has received rave reviews. Welsh National Team manager Bobby Gould wrote, "The new Mitre Ultimax is brilliant. The ball is fast and true with a special feel to

it. When you strike the ball it has the 'ping' and sweetness of the old natural leather ball. Streets ahead of the competition."

Mitre's dedication to quality and performance is evident in its entire range of balls, from its professional match balls to its junior training and recreational balls.

As players, conditions and skills differ greatly, it is important to choose the Mitre ball which best suits the application and age group of the players.

HIGH TENSILE, MULTICORE SYNTHETIC TREADS
WAXED FOR IMPROVED WATER RESISTANCE AND HAND STITCHED WITH MORE THAN 2000 STITCHES PER BALL.

TRUE SYNTHETIC LEATHER
EMPLOYING THE LATEST MICROFIBRE TECHNOLOGY AND COATING TECHNIQUES, DEVELOPED WITH MITRE AND PRODUCED EXCLUSIVELY FOR MITRE IN JAPAN.

PRE PUNCHED STITCHED HOLES
DESIGNED INTO A KNIFE DEVELOPEL FOR THE EXACTING STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL PLAY.

SEAMLESS LATEX BLADDER
INDIVIDUALLY MATCHED TO GIVE REQUIRED PLAYING WEIGHTS.

MULTI-LAYER LAMINATION
SPECIALLY DESIGNED TO GIVE TOTAL SHAPE CONTROL THROUGHOUT THE LIFE OF THE BALL.





Pro Targa SI and Pro Targa PU

- Smooth, full grain waxy calf leather upper
- Lightweight padding at toe and ankle provides the firmer fit demanded by top players
- Pre-moulded heel counter minimises injuries with correct heel location
- Dual purpose flop tongue
- Soft PU heel lining reduces foot slippage
- SI Model: New-Esprit moulded PU outsole with shank stability and nylon forefoot pad for reduced torque
- PU Model: New-Rafale PU multistud outsole with longer anatomically positioned studs.
- Sizes: US 7 to 12 including 1/2s and 13



Pro Europa SI and Pro Europa PU

- Smooth, full grain waxy Nappa leather upper for excellent "ball feel" and control
- Lightweight padding in toe box, collar and tongue for superior comfort and protection
- Pre-moulded heel counter minimises injuries with correct heel location
- Pro style embroidered leather flop tongue
- SI Model: New-Esprit moulded PU outsole with shank stability and nylon forefoot pad for reduced torque
- PU Model: New-Rafale PU multistud outsole with longer anatomically positioned studs.
- Sizes: US 7 to 12 including 1/2s and 13



Santiago SI and Santiago PU

- Soft full grain Nappa leather upper
- Pre-moulded heel counter minimises injuries with correct heel location
- Lightweight and flexible Texon insole and correct forefoot flexibility and heel stability
- Leather pro style flop tongue
- SI Model: New-Esprit moulded PU outsole with shank stability and forefoot flex groove
- Cemented, stitched and riveted outsole construction
- PU Model: New-Rafale PU multistud outsole with longer anatomically positioned studs.
- Sizes: US 7 to 12 including 1/2s and 13



Intergrale SI and Intergrale PU

- Soft, full grain leather vamp and quarters with quality synthetic balance
- Full padded toe box and ankle collar
- Dual purpose tongue offers flop over option
- Synthetic heel counter for precise heel location to minimise injury
- SI Model: New-Esprit moulded PU outsole with shank stability and forefoot flex groove
- Cemented stitched and riveted outsole construction
- PU model: New-Rafale PU multistud outsole with longer anatomically positioned studs.
- Sizes: US 7 to 12 including 1/2s and 13



Lima SI and Lima MR

- New Supertech synthetic leather upper - looks, feels and performs like full grain leather
- Padded PU heel lining and dual tongue with woven label
- Synthetic heel counter for additional stability
- SI Model: New-Esprit moulded PU outsole in three colours
- Cemented, stitched and riveted outsole construction with metal tipped studs
- MR Model: Triple density rubber multistud outsole - cemented stitched and riveted to upper.
- Sizes: US 7 to 12 including 1/2s and 13



Diabolo SI, Diabolo MR and Diabolo Junior

- High spec Gametech synthetic leather upper
- Padded ankle collar and tongue
- SI Model: Polished high gloss "super six" outsole. Two colour replaceable Nylon studs
- Stitched forefoot and riveted toe/heel for durability
- MR Model: Dual density rubber multistud outsole - cemented, stitched and riveted to upper.
- Sizes: Adult US 7 to 12, Junior US 10 to 6



Match and Training Balls

Professional Match and Training Balls

Ultimax

26 Panel competition match ball - Size 5

QUALITY: Professional quality synthetic leather employing latest microfibre technology and coating techniques to produce exclusive 'soft touch' material with low water absorption. Multi layer lamination for shape control and perfect balance.

PERFORMANCE: The ultimate in ball performance:- Super fast through the air and soft to the touch. Designed to maximise on power and player skills. The Ultimax can achieve speeds of 160km per hour through the air and will fly straight as an arrow and can be bent or curled by players with the skills to do so.

SUITABILITY: Professional competition match ball for the highest standard of soccer. Official ball of the FA Premier League, Soccer Australia and the Ericsson Cup.



Pro Max

26 Panel Match Ball - Size 5

QUALITY: Professional quality competition match ball. Alternative official match ball of English Premier League, Soccer Australia and Ericsson cup.

PERFORMANCE: Tough high grip urethane surface with Mitre's most advanced backing systems and bladder technology give the Pro Max a true flight with lively performance and allows expression of players' skills at the highest level of the game.

SUITABILITY: Excellent on all match quality surfaces and can even be used on asphalt. High grip surface is particularly valued in wet weather and allows a high degree of control.



Senior Match and Training Balls



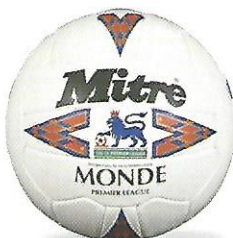
Copa

26 Panel Match Ball - Size 5

QUALITY: Competition quality match ball for use at all levels of the game.

PERFORMANCE: With durable PU surface backed by Mitre's best quality backing cloths, hand laminated and balanced, the Copa makes quality performance available to all levels of soccer.

SUITABILITY: Excellent on all match quality surfaces and can be used on Astro Turf and indoor surfaces.



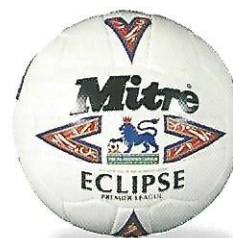
Monde

18 Panel Match Ball - Size 5

QUALITY: Competition quality match ball with light feel and lively character.

PERFORMANCE: Soft polyurethane coated surface, backed by Mitre's exclusive polyester backing cloths, hand laminated and balanced for strength and shape retention with seamless bladder. The Monde's performance can develop and enhance playing skills in both matches and training.

SUITABILITY: Excellent match ball for all levels and especially popular for youth matches and women's soccer.



Eclipse

18 Panel Match and Training Ball - Size 5

QUALITY: Top quality performance match and training ball for all levels of soccer.

PERFORMANCE: Made from Japanese synthetic leather and with Mitre's hand laminated and balanced backing system, the Eclipse delivers lively yet controllable performance both on the ground and in flight.

SUITABILITY: Ideal as a match and training ball for all levels of soccer and particularly popular as a match ball for youth and school soccer.



Mundial

18 Panel Match and Training Ball - Sizes 4 & 5

QUALITY: Club match and training ball designed for durability, performance and economy.

PERFORMANCE: Manufactured with multi layer polyester and canvas backing system with shiny hard wearing vulcanised surface, the Mundial is particularly resistant to water absorption. High grip surface and low bounce character encourages ball control and passing accuracy in all weather conditions.

SUITABILITY: Recommended for use on almost all surfaces particularly harder grounds, Astro Turf and more abrasive surfaces. The Mundial is suitable for all age levels of soccer.



Cosmic

18 Panel Match and Training Ball - Size 5

QUALITY: An ideal introduction to true soccer ball performance for younger levels of soccer.

PERFORMANCE: Cosmic offers strength and lively performance often found in more expensive balls. Hand laminated, four layer polyester lining with natural latex seamless bladder.

SUITABILITY: Soft, supple polyurethane surface makes the Cosmic an especially popular match and training ball with younger players and can be used on most playing surfaces. It is not recommended for high abrasion surfaces.



Ultima Premier League

18 Panel Training Ball and Junior Match Ball - Sizes 3,4 & 5

QUALITY: Replica quality ball manufactured to official size and weight standards.

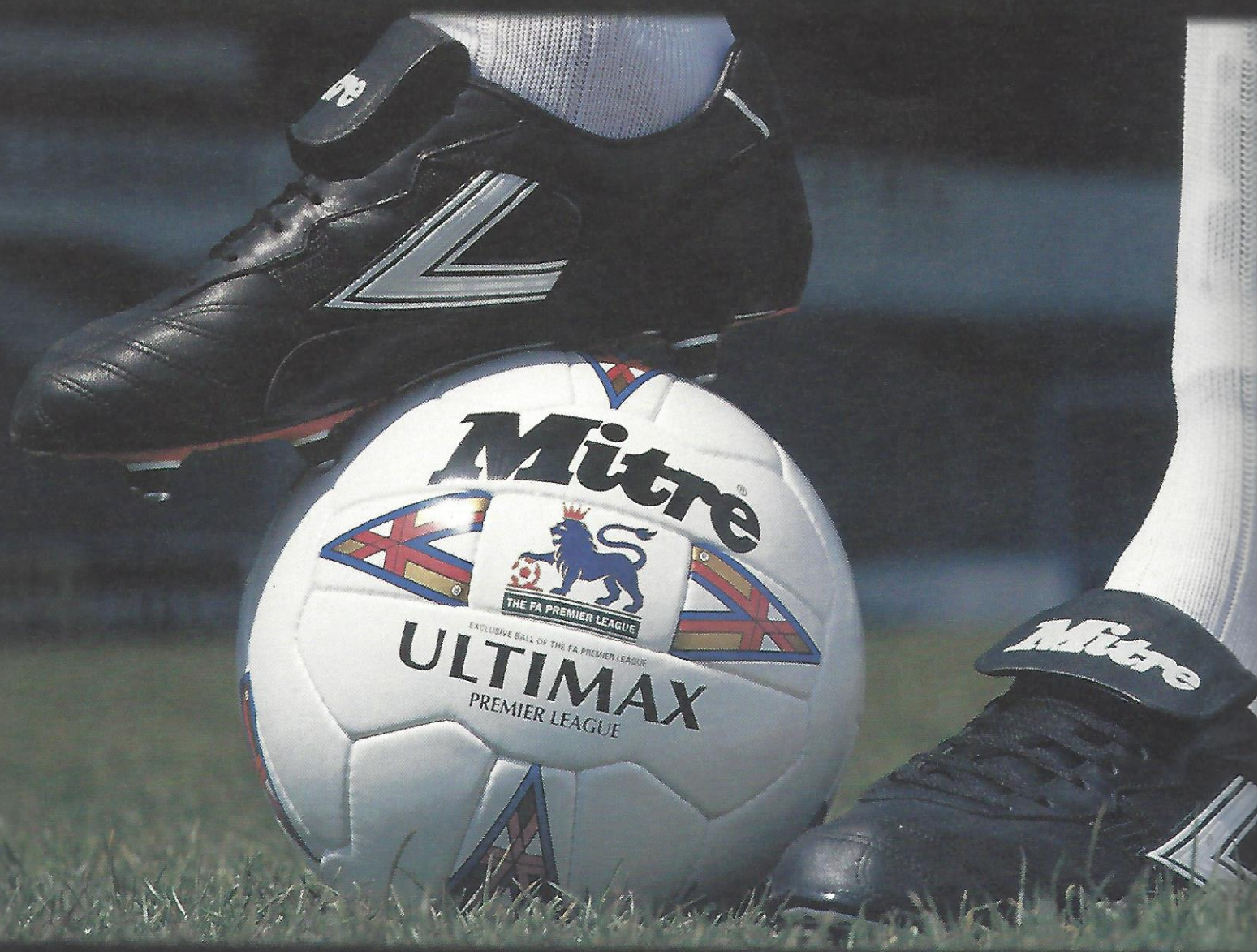
PERFORMANCE: Scuff resistant PVC and backed with multi layer polyester and cotton backers. The Premier League has a mid range bounce performance and its soft feel patent PVC surface is excellent for the development of individual skills and as a practice ball.

SUITABILITY: Recommended for use on grass and many indoor surfaces. Ideal junior match ball and practice ball for development of skills.



The name of the game





Grow big shoots



ALESSANDRO DEL PIERO
JUVENTUS & ITALY

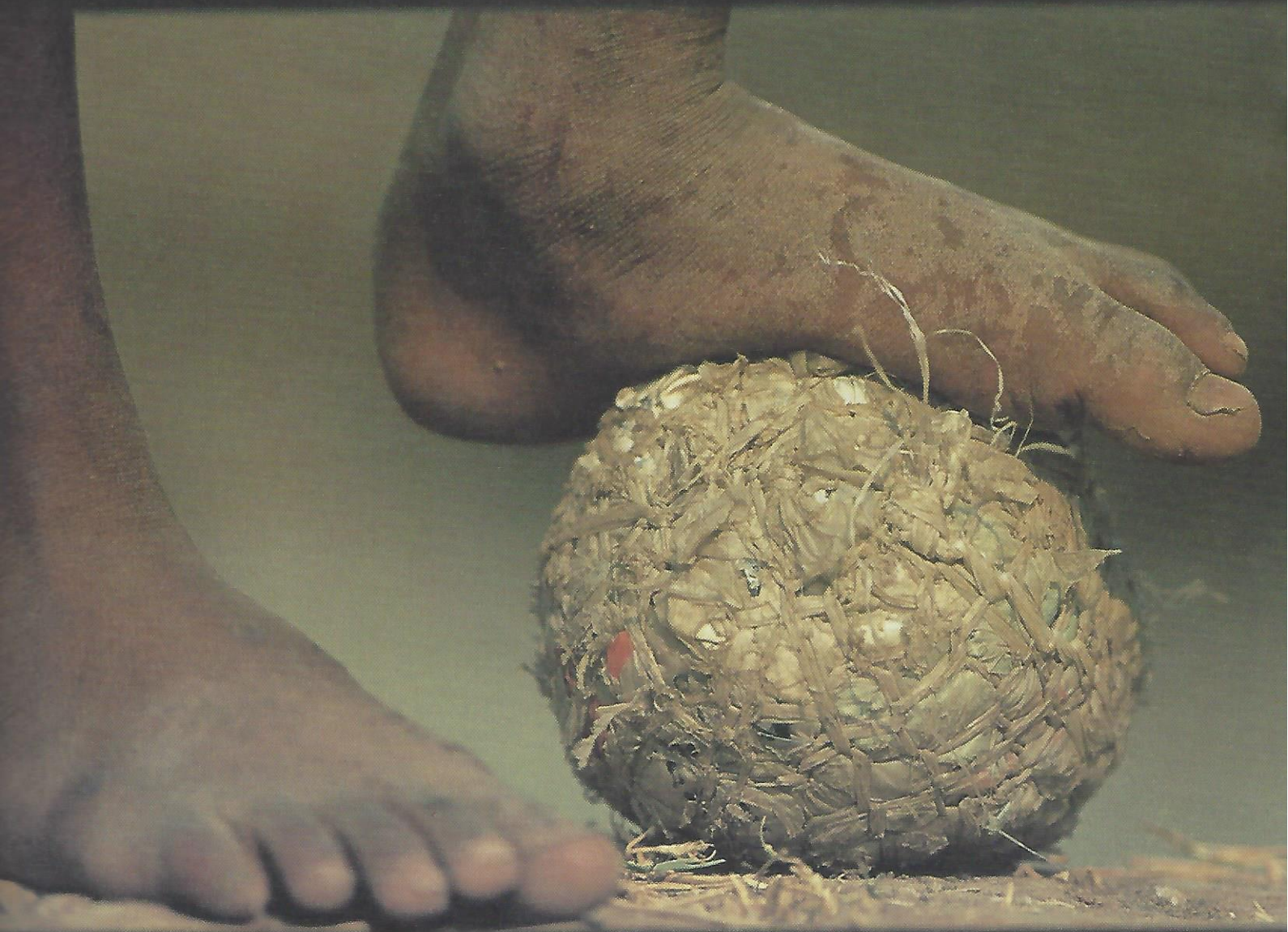




Mitre®



From grass roots.



Junior Match and Training Balls



Magma

18 Panel Training and Junior Match Ball - Sizes 3,4 & 5

QUALITY: Replica quality ball manufactured to official size and weight standards. Soft feel patent PVC surface.

PERFORMANCE: Mid range bounce and excellent for developing skills during training. The Magma is made from supple, scuff resistant PVC and backed with multi layer polyester and cotton backers.

SUITABILITY: An excellent junior match and training ball and recommended for use on grass and many indoor surfaces. An ideal ball for junior soccer instruction.



Elite

18 Panel Training and Junior Development Match Ball - Sizes 3,4 & 5

QUALITY: Replica quality ball manufactured to official size and weight.

PERFORMANCE: Mid range bounce performance. Made from tough grain PVC and backed with multi layer backers. An excellent ball for skill development and ideal for individual practice and training at a budget price.

SUITABILITY: Recommended for use on grass and is suitable for many indoor surfaces. Ideal club ball for junior training and development - can be used as a match ball for lower junior age groups.



Demon

18 Panel training ball - Size 4 and 5

QUALITY: New improved vulcanised rubber laminate construction with seamless latex bladder. For its price the Demon has excellent durability, performance and economy. Hard wearing and has low water absorption.

PERFORMANCE: Low bounce performance. Excellent for training and encourages development of ball control and passing accuracy.

SUITABILITY: Recommended for training and individual skills on almost any surface and in most conditions.

Individual Skills and Recreational Balls

Vasco

32 Panel Junior Training and Recreational Ball - Sizes 3,4 & 5

QUALITY: Recreational quality and junior development ball.

PERFORMANCE: Constructed from PVC and backed with four layer cotton backers, this ball has a mid range bounce and is an excellent introductory training or recreational ball.

SUITABILITY: Ideal for clubs and recommended for lower age groups as an introductory training and recreational ball. Suitable for use on grass surfaces.



Azteca

32 Panel Recreational Ball - Size 5

QUALITY: Recreational quality ball.

PERFORMANCE: Laminated PVC non stitched ball for recreational and junior school purposes.

SUITABILITY: Recommended as a recreational/play ball or school practice ball.



Fifa Ball Denominations

Q. Which matches do the FIFA ball denomination affect?

A. Only matches played under the jurisdiction of FIFA and Confederations namely international matches involving the Socceroos, Olyroos or other national teams (e.g. Australian Women's team, Under 17 Australian team etc.) require "FIFA Approved", "FIFA Inspected" or "International Matchball Standards" denominations on the ball.

All other matches played in Australia at all levels of soccer do not require FIFA denominations. The only stipulated requirements are that the balls must conform to the "Official Size and Weight" regulation.

State Federation requirements

Q. Is it compulsory for State licensed balls to have the State logo printed on them?

A. No it is not. An officially licensed ball by a State Federation need not have the State logo printed on it. The only stipulated requirement is that all matches are to be played with a brand of balls officially licensed by the State Federation.

Useful maintenance tips

- After use in wet weather, the ball should be wiped with a dry cloth to remove excess mud and water, and then left in a light, airy place to dry out.
- Do not use a dryer or heater to dry a ball.
- Avoid leaving a wet ball in a dark enclosed area, (e.g. car boot, gear bag or dark cupboard) as it will become mouldy and cause panels to rot and lift.
- When inflating the ball, moisten the inflation needle with saliva or preferably glycerine before inserting it into the ball. Should a leak be detected through the inflation valve - carefully re-insert the needle and "work it around" in and out of the valve to dislodge any grit which has found its way into the valve.
- Care should be taken that the needle does not break off in the valve, or that the bladder is not pierced when the needle is inserted into the ball.
- New balls should ideally be inflated to the recommended pressure, left for a few hours, then deflated and re-inflated again to the required pressure.
- Mitre performance balls are fitted with latex bladders. Latex is a natural material which stretches (expands) and contracts. It also "breathes" and therefore over time will lose air. This is quite normal. Balls should be inflated to recommended pressure before each match or training sessions.

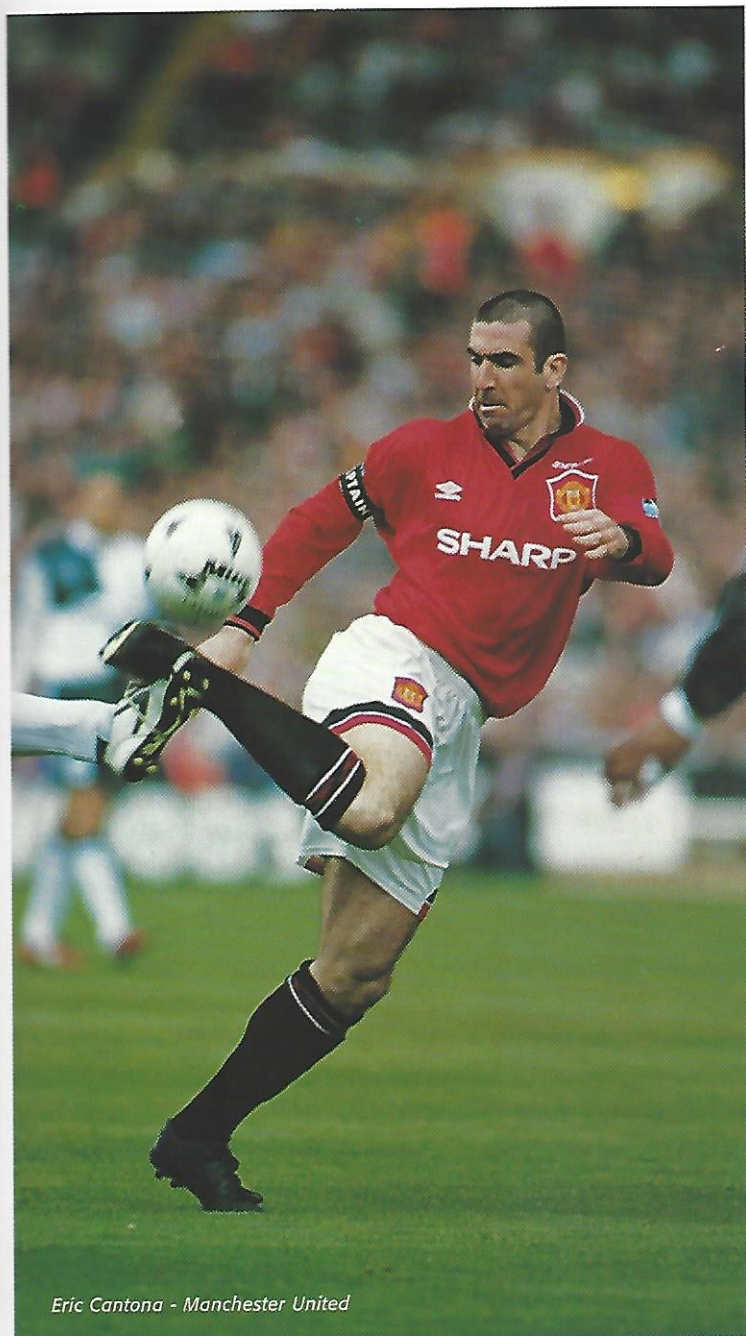
NB: Always store balls in an airy, light dry area when not in use!!!



The name of the game



Shinguards and Goalkeeping Gloves



Eric Cantona - Manchester United



Pro Monde Shinguard

High impact PE "Phinoguard" shell
4mm EVA foam backing stitched to shell
Velcro elastic strap
Sizes: Senior, Junior, Boys



Pro Destiny Shinguard

Unique precurved high impact PE shell for comfortable fit
5mm EVA foam backing stitched to shell
Velcro elastic strap
Sizes: Senior, Junior



Pro Lite Premier Shinguard

Textile fronted with internal high impact PE shell and EVA Foam backing for shock absorption
Padded ankle and Achilles protection
Velcro elastic strap
Sizes: Senior, Junior



Shield Classic Shinguard

High impact PE Shell with twin EVA Foam layers enclosing hollow tubes to cushion and disperse impact
Detachable neoprene ankle protector with soft inbuilt ankle discs
Velcro elastic straps
Size: Senior

Copa

Size 5, 6 and 7

White compressed German latex palm for maximum grip.

Half wristband with velcro closure.

Vented gussets for greater comfort.



Titan and Guardian

Size 6, 7, 8 and 9

German latex palm with diamond embossed pattern for greater ball security.

Half wristband with velcro closure.

Vented gussets for greater comfort.

Excellent durability on hard grounds.



The name of the game



New Faster Blaster Pump

New - "State of the Art" double action pump - inflates when handle is extended as well as when depressed.

Spare needle supplied.



Power Pump

Durable, dependable fast inflation pump.

Supplied with extension hose.

Needle storage cavity in handle.



Two-piece Inflation Needle (twin pack)

Detachable two way valve - unscrew and invert for deflation.

Always moisten with saliva or preferably glycerine before inserting it into the ball's inflation valve.

Two needle assemblies supplied.

Two-piece Inflation Needle (single pack)

Detachable two way valve - unscrew and invert for deflation.

Always moisten with saliva or preferably glycerine before inserting it into the ball's inflation valve.

One needle assembly supplied.



Metal Whistle with Lanyard

Brass with nickel plating.

Nylon cord lanyard.



Finger Grip Whistle

Brass with nickel plating.

Comfortable finger grip.



Plastic Whistle

Hi-impact plastic construction.


Nylon cord lanyard.





Fabrizio Ravanelli - Middlesbrough

As a commitment to Mitre's customers a series of great new print media ads have been developed. These will be strategically placed in magazines throughout the 1997 soccer season.

From grass roots...






...Grow big shoots



The changing face of soccer

The official ball supplier to

Caught.
Ball watching!

The official ball supplier to


The name of the game

Customised Balls: Mitre is able to supply special-make-up balls for clubs, retailers and promotional use. Call your local representative for more information.

State Representative Agent:

Exclusive Australian Distributors

Available at:



PO Box 876, Rosebery, NSW 2018
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Top scorer Bobby Despotovski leaves South Melbourne's Nick Orlic on the deck.

Go West

Perth Glory have surprised everybody, possibly including themselves, with the confident start they've made in their debut season in the national league. SBS-TV commentator PAUL WILLIAMS reports on the Ericsson Cup's newest phenomenon.

If six months ago you'd said to Gary Marocchi, coach of the Perth Glory, that halfway into the season his side would be nestled near the top of the league he probably would have laughed in your face.

The Glory have shaken the competition like a rag doll. They have defied all the logistical factors as to why it's impossible for a new team to be successful in their first season. A squad of players with little or no experience at Ericsson Cup level, on average at least 10 hours travelling time for away matches, no reserve competition for squad members to keep match fit in, a

supporter base of zero, a borrowed home ground with no official base for the club, owners embarking on their first-ever venture with a professional sporting club – the list goes on, but it all pointed to a season of hard slog.

But along with their league position the most eye-opening feature of Perth is the fact that every second Saturday 8,000 supporters, on average, squash themselves into Perth Oval to make the Glory overnight the best supported team in the country!

Not only do they come along in numbers, but they're noisy too. Frank Arok,

coach of the Gippsland Falcons, found his side 3-0 up at half time in Perth recently. The final score was 3-2 with Perth staging a courageous second half rally. Arok was adamant that the crowd, which he described as 'Kop-like' – a reference to Liverpool's fanatical supporters – lifted the side back into the match. There's even singing on the terraces as well – the alcohol-oiled tonsils of a large number of British locals can take some credit for Perth's position on the ladder.

They continue to break all the rules in front of goal too. The traditional approach

of coaches in Marocchi's situation is to play a defensive brand of soccer to make sure that the team doesn't get thrashed. Instead it's Perth who are handling out the hidings. They clubbed Canberra 6-0 in Perth and a few weeks later went to Brisbane and fired five past them – Brisbane were second in the league at that stage! Glory are now the second highest scorers in the country averaging well over two goals over a game.

Perth Glory openly admit they're in the league 12 months too soon, but circumstances meant that the club found themselves kicking off at home to UTS Olympic last October. The adventure began



Vinko Buljbasic migrated west from Melbourne Knights to help the Perth cause.

in 1995 when a license to compete in the national league was put out to tender.

A combined proposal from two businessmen, Nick Tana and Paul Afkos, was the most professional response and made history with Perth the first club in the competition to be

born from private enterprise. Both are highly successful in the corporate world, both are very well known in the Perth scene – indeed the pair bailed out the innovative but financially disastrous Perth Kangaroos venture in the Singapore league.

The venue for home matches is the Perth Oval, home for the East Perth Football Club (that's football as in Aussie Rules Football). Now, I for one, am not a big fan of soccer played on a football oval. Ever since watching Australia v AC Milan at Optus Oval and calling the Australia v Ghana game at the WACA I can't help feeling that no matter where you're sitting it feels like you're in the back row. But Glory's solution for this deserves some applause.

"On the opposite side of the pitch from the main stand a temporary stand is

erected," said General Manager Roger Lefort. "It's a purpose built stand that looks like a permanent stand made from modern materials. It seats 1736 people and costs us about \$350,000 a season. The stand gives the pitch that fully-enclosed look and we feel that is necessary to generate a good atmosphere on match day."

And that's not the only reason why match day is special in Perth. Lefort's charter was to make match day memorable for the supporters and Perth are top of the Ericsson Cup in this particular competition.

Before the game the Fab Four rock group work the crowd and this includes a rendition of the club's theme song which is played before every game. There are clowns, stilt walkers, magicians and other entertainers, so even if the match is a bit lacklustre the day is still fun, especially for the masses of kids that attend. Marocchi also addresses all club members and invited guests of the sponsors at an afternoon function on the day of the game – it's all part of the master plan to enrol the city of Perth in the cause of the club.

The club has a two year amnesty on the dreaded floodlight issue and in that time hopes to have a more tailored venue organised, probably in the form of a new stadium built with assistance from the State Government. As WA does not participate in daylight saving, games are played in very warm temperatures indeed. If coaches think the Brisbane road trip is tough, the 4-5 hour flight west plus a match in 30-35 degrees is the excursion from hell.

That being the case, you'd think that when Perth are on the road they'd be easybeats. They recently drew with Collingwood Warriors in Melbourne, surprising coach Zoran Matic. "They were the better team on the day and deserved to beat us. They're a very unified team, every player fights for everybody else, they have a good spirit," said Matic.

Matic, in particular, may look at Perth's success rather ruefully. Matic and Marocchi are old mates from Marocchi's time at Adelaide City in the late '70s and early '80s. Before the season started Matic had first refusal

on striker Bobby Despotovski as he was playing with Collingwood affiliate Heidelberg at the time. Perth desperately wanted Despotovski to sign for them as he had been outstanding in a previous stint in the WA State League. He's now the Glory's top scorer.

Marocchi has been a coach long enough to be realistic about his team's chances at the start of the season when I asked where he thought his team would finish the season, a grin came to his face. "Well, I've been informed by the board that they see no reason why the team cannot finish in seventh or even sixth spot, and that is the expectation from management. Personally if we finish outside of the bottom three I will be very happy with the season."

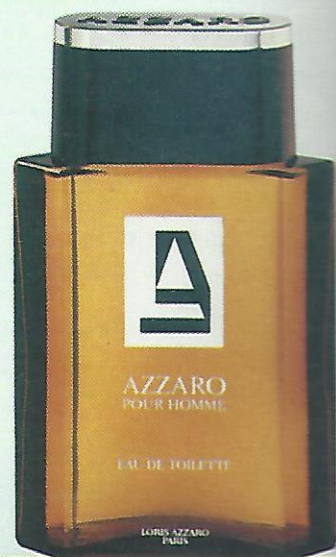
But now the sights have been raised significantly higher, and certainly the board expects at least a top six place. In Despotovski and Strudwick the side has consistent goal-getters, the equal of any in the league. The acquisition of the hard working Vas Kalogeracos adds to the potency of the attack, plus the drive of captain Gareth Naven in midfield is exceptional.

In defence there have been some nervous moments, but with every game it appears more sure of itself. The question marks about the starting eleven are minimal but the squad has yet to be tested with a string of injuries, and if Marocchi had to call on some of the bench players who haven't been playing any competition football at it could be tough (I'd also put money on that every night Marocchi prays to the football God in the sky to keep Despotovski warm, safe and injury free!).

The whole country feels a mixture of surprise, excitement and envy about the Perth revolution. The model of a club backed by corporate identities is another unique to the West Australians and I'm sure many of the other Ericsson Cup aspirants are watching closely. Certainly, to date Perth have set new standards both off and on the park that other clubs can emulate. Anything that progresses the sport of soccer in this country is to be applauded and the successful Perth Glory is clearly achieving that.



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After a turbulent off-season, the Brisbane Strikers were tipped by many to struggle in their first year under Frank Farina.

But the new coach has kept the Queenslanders on track with an injection of youth into an ageing squad, as BRENT READ explains.

The kids are alright

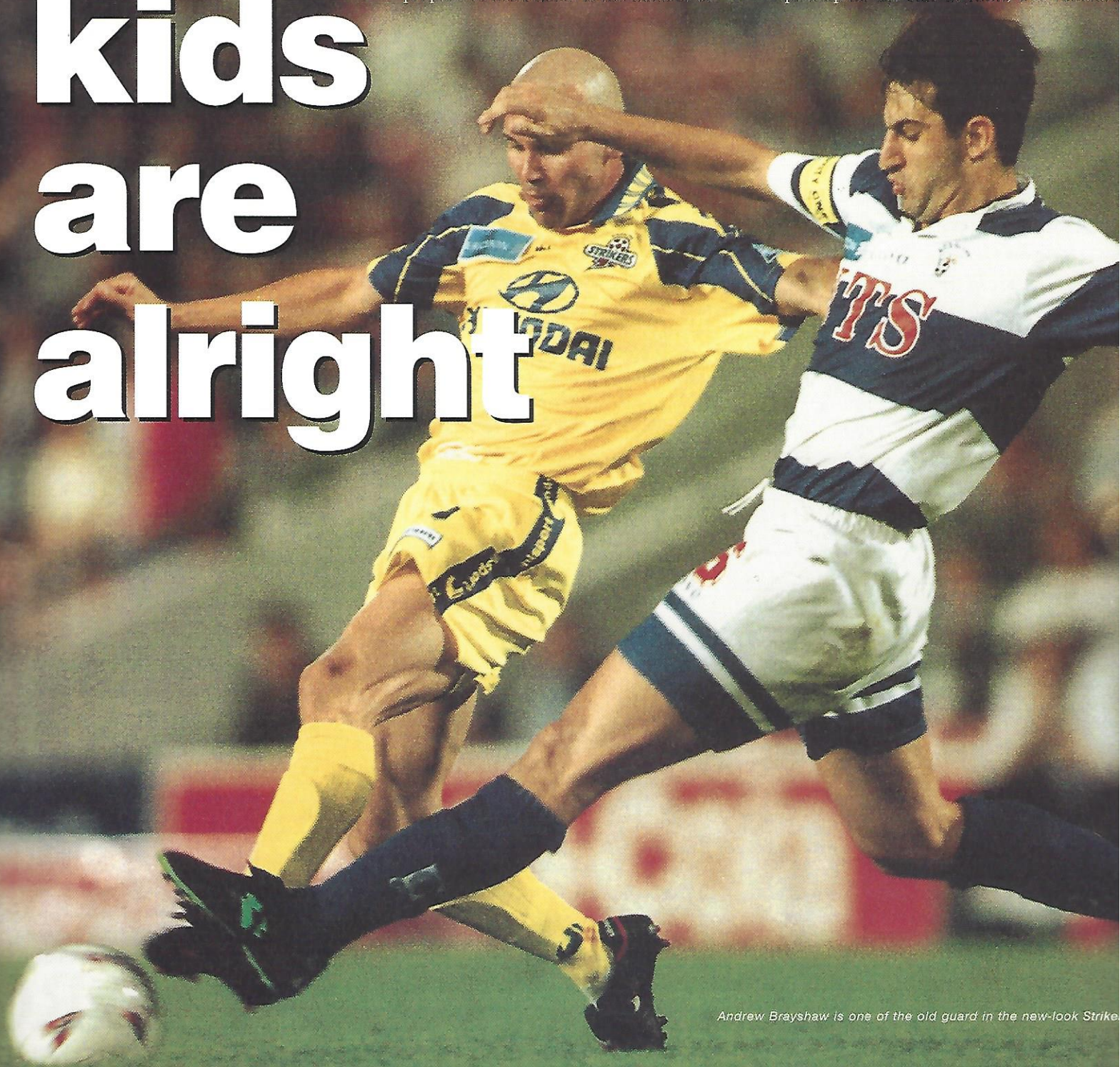
On a typically humid summer's night in Brisbane, the Strikers squad recover from a tough draw in West Adelaide with a light training session in the Brisbane suburb of Hendra. Watching the players swim laps, it's easy to sense the confidence exuding from the squad assembled under new player-coach Frank Farina.

While the Strikers were last season's surprise packet, sneaking under everyone's guard and threatening to steal the premiership, this year the opposition were prepared to weather the Strikers storm. But once again the Strikers have a new edge to their game.

What becomes obvious as the players prepare to head home is the number of

young players in the squad. Under Farina, the Strikers have undergone a catharsis. Many experts had expected the Strikers to suffer from a second year slump after their breakout season in 1995/96, but the club instead riding high at the top of the Ericsson Cup.

That achievement alone can not be understated. The experts' cynicism concerning the Strikers in 1996 was probably well-founded. Not only had the club been through a well-publicised split with coach Bruce Stowell, but they'd lost several of their highest profile players. Australian midfielder Jason Polak, a bargain pick-up for the club in 1995, was rumoured



Andrew Brayshaw is one of the old guard in the new-look Strikers.



Kasey Wehrman (left) takes on the Knights.

to be headed for the Collingwood Warriors but instead linked with his old club South Melbourne. New Zealand international Chris Zoricich, who never

quite got the accolades he deserved, also decided to head for "greener pastures" and forge a professional career in England.

But the majority of last season's team remains. Names such as Farina, Alan Hunter, the Cranney brothers Sean and Troy, Rod Brown, Gary Phillips, Glen Gwynne and Clint Bolton still appear on the team sheet week in, week out. Added to that mix are young players such as defender Mark Battistin and Andrew Brayshaw, both of whom made a significant mark with the Strikers last year. This mix made for a recipe for success in 1996.

While former coach Bruce Stowell had been the butt of much criticism for his perceived reticence to use young players, Farina has never been averse to placing a young player in the squad and leaving them to sink or swim. With limited funds and a dearth of quality players on the open market, Farina, a believer in the adage "If you're good enough, you're old enough", decided to place his faith in Queensland's young talent.

"I honestly believe the players have got to come from somewhere. We can't just continue to go with older, experienced players," Farina says with an eye to the future. This policy has seen players such as Wayne Knipe, Kasey Wehrman and Matthew Bell receive more exposure than a streaker at the MCG.

All three are signs of a changing of the guard at the Strikers. It is well worth remembering players such as Hunter, Brown, Phillips, Danny Wright and Farina himself are over 30 and staring retirement in the face. The club needed a new breed of talent to capture the dwindling crowd's imagination.

In that sense, although crowd numbers are inexplicably still down at Suncorp Stadium, Knipe, Wehrman and Bell are starting to create a cult following at the club.

Knipe, South African-born, was the first of the three to capture the attention of soccer supporters in Brisbane. Deeply religious, he is renowned as the team's practical joker. No player is safe. "I like to have fun. I'm just myself. I'm just expressing what's inside me," he says a little indignantly.

Wehrman, quietly confident and dedicated, hails from Cloncurry, a corner kick from Mt Isa. The wildest thing this level-headed youngster does is celebrate his goals with something more akin to what you'd expect from gymnast Mary-Lou Retton rather than one of the game's most talented young players.

Bell, intelligent and articulate, has recently returned from a tour of South America with the Australian youth squad - different personalities but all supremely gifted. The three spend endless hours together. Playing golf, hanging out, clubbing. Even their girlfriends are best friends. They also have a talent for soccer and a thirst for success. They feed off each other's achievements. All three are products of the Queensland Academy of Sport (QAS), where they cut their teeth under the tutelage of former NSL and Australian striker Greg Brown.

The QAS is a unique facility, designed primarily to get the state's most talented youngsters selected in Australian under-age squads. Its secondary goal is to serve as a feeder system for the Strikers, preparing players for the NSL.

"Once they can handle the rigours of adults we have them play with the Strikers," Brown explains. "If they get to a certain level I tell Frank these lads aren't progressing. They need to go with you."

Wehrman, Knipe and Bell are also involved in the Strikers' elite traineeship system, where they combine soccer with work experience. According to Brown, they were always destined for higher honours. "These guys were very open-minded," said

Brown, a player at Parramatta and West Adelaide during his NSL career. "They were happy to listen and learn. I think the ability to do that has got them where they are."

The trio trained with the Strikers last year but only officially joined the squad in 1996. Farina knew almost immediately he wanted all three in his squad. "I can train with a player for one week and tell if they have something or not," says Farina of the young players. He obviously liked what he saw with the latest crop of teenagers and the coach has been rewarded for his loyalty.

Wehrman, in particular, has caught the eye of the soccer public both in his own state and around the country. The 19 year old has come a long way since he tripped over his own feet on national television in his debut against Adelaide City. While Bell and Knipe were members of the national youth squad, Wehrman has had to do it the hard way, through a combination of hard work and commitment.

While his play on the field has been spectacular, his goal scoring celebrations have also been eye-catching. The somersaults and backflips were something he learnt while living in Mt Isa and practising on a friend's bed out of boredom. But while the press is enamoured with Wehrman, he knows success can be fleeting. The sporting graveyard is littered with the carcasses of young players whose careers started in a blaze of glory and ended with barely a flicker.

"I go with the notion that this week I'll play good and they write good things about me but next week I'll play bad and they'll write crap about me," Wehrman says matter-of-factly. He is more concerned with his coach and team mates' opinion.

And there is little doubt the coach is impressed by what he's seen. "Kasey's come through and taken like a duck to water," says Farina.

Wehrman, Knipe and Bell have all taken to the NSL like ducks to water. They could be part of something special in the Queensland capital this year. A premiership is a very real possibility. If that happens, the whole side will be doing backflips.

Careering towards Croatia

The decision of teenager Joe Simunic to represent Croatia rather than Australia has raised the ire of many people, both within the local soccer community and beyond. Bert van Bedaf analyses the issues.

"He has made a mature decision for the benefit of his career, because he believes his best opportunities lie overseas."

Hang on, who are we talking about here? Rupert Murdoch? After all, Australia's media magnate opted for U.S. citizenship to further his ambitions of becoming a global media mogul. Murdoch made a clever career move, as he now owns much of the world's communications industry, in Britain, continental Europe, USA and Asia.

In fact the quote is by Kimon Taliadoros, captain of the Collingwood Warriors and president of the Australian Soccer Players Association, talking about Joe Simunic, of the Melbourne Knights, who has chosen to play for Croatia to further his career and not for Australia.

Shock, horror. Eighteen-year-old Simunic, whose parents were born in Croatia, has d-e-f-e-c-t-e-d. Having spent \$80,000 of taxpayers' funds over two years on him at the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra, where Simunic was born, Australia now thinks it owns him and he owes it.

If it hadn't been for Michael Jackson being in the country, a lot more would have been written and said about Joe's jay-walk

across the great divide, from Canberra to Zagreb, from potential hero to ultimate villain, from a good investment for Australia to a big step in a young man's short career.

As it happened, headline writers still managed to have their field day. Hence, 'Teenage star turns back on Australia' in the Adelaide Advertiser (4/12/96), 'Youth star defects to Europe' in the Sydney Morning Herald (4/12/96), 'Teenage star to put Croatia first' in Melbourne's The Age (4/12/96). A day later (5/12/96), Melbourne's Herald Sun summarised, 'Soccer star's defection leaves sour taste'.

Soccer Australia chairman David Hill stoically accepted. "If his heart is not in playing for Australia and it is in playing for Croatia, there's nothing I or anybody else can do about it."

Initially, when news filtered out Simunic would opt for the land of his parents' birth, commentator Johnny Warren, the former Australian captain, said, "I think it's outrageous. We understand the time in history it is for Croatia. We understand the background and we sympathise in that respect. But you've got to declare you're either for us or against us. There has to be some commitment and something has to be sorted out."

A few weeks later, when Simunic made his decision public and official by sending a



letter to Soccer Australia, Warren proved a month can be a lifetime in a commentator's stroboscopic experience.

He said, "I'm just taking a different perspective. He (Simunic) is making a career move. He's had role models of coaches and players who have made a career move by going somewhere else. Eddie Thomson has made a career move after three-and-a-half years of tax payers' money if you like. His career move is to go to Japan."

Peter Desira, in the Herald Sun, pointed to AIS products Hayden Foxe, Craig Moore, Lucas Neill and Andrew McDermott, who moved overseas after spending time at the Institute to learn their trade.

The pendulum gradually tick-tocked away from questioning ethnic loyalties towards acknowledging Murdoch-like pragmatism.

Grantley Barnard, in The Australian, wrote, "This is not the first time Australia has lost the chance to clad a potential star in green and gold. Adelaide-raised Tony Dorigo, now left-back for Leeds, chose to play for England. Tony Dorigo probably thinks of himself as an Australian person, but an English footballer. This is not an ethnic debate for Simunic. It is a career move. He is a Croatian for his profession."

Thomson mourned the money aspect. "I suppose it would cost around \$40,000 (per year) for a boy to attend the Institute (AIS) and they go on plenty of tours. In Joe's case, the money has been a total waste."

Simunic twice declined to play for the Young Socceroos, which earned him two league suspensions. He did not join the under-20 tour to South America or South Africa, which will have saved Soccer Australia a few dollars.

Once the talented sweeper leaves for Europe, SocAus stands to earn 10 per cent from his transfer. Add to this the substantial contribution the Simunic family would have made in paying tax during their son's lifetime and it is fairly safe to assume the monetary ledger is squared.

Before his decision, Simunic had this to say: "I've got to size everything up. I can't say much about it. I've been advised not to say anything about it. I want to go to



Europe as soon as possible. I've had a few talks with people. I think I have a good chance of making it over there."

On the day of his announcement, he revealed it had been "the hardest decision I've ever had to make in my life. It's more or less a career decision by me. It's not my background. It's just that I'll get more exposure playing over there."

Overtures by the Croatian Football Association had influenced him. "They talked to me about the possibility of me playing for Croatia, starting at under 21 level, and I've decided to make myself available. I'll be playing for a club in Europe, which I hope will happen soon. Once I'm doing that, I'll get called up. It's not as if I'm the first. Craig Johnston and Tony Dorigo did it before me, announcing they would rather play for England than Australia."

Simunic's position is not unique, here or internationally. Jordi Cruyff, the son of Dutch star Johan Cruyff, who captained Holland in the 1974 World Cup final, was born in Spain where his father played for and coached Barcelona.

Jordi's soccer skills were honed in Spain and there was considerable pressure and expectation that he would represent the country of his birth at international level. Eventually he chose to play for Holland at Euro 96 last June. The Spanish soccer world did not collapse, there was no inquisition, no burning at the stake.

These days patriotism plays a loyal tune in the new-found 'mainstream' of Australian soccer. Ericsson Cup matches are preceded by solemn renditions of the national anthem. Everyone - spectators, players, referees, officials, the souvlaki stall-keeper and the peanut salesman - rises to the occasion.

But in a free country and a global market an individual is entitled to make the choices he believes to be best for his long-term interests. Taliadoros agreed: "There's no doubt Joe deserves the right to make this sort of decision. The real solution for Australian soccer is to create career paths for players and provide them with the financial incentive that is required (for them) to remain in Australia."

by **PATRICK MANGAN**

A century of sometimes bitter rivalry has ensured that Liverpool supporters generally don't think much of Evertonians. But one Everton fan, with jubilant memories of his team's golden era in the mid-1980s when Graeme Sharp, Peter Reid and Andy Gray ruled the roost in the city, has been well and truly embraced by the Liverpool faithful. His name is Robbie Fowler.

And the 21-year-old has done plenty to justify their love, having recently scored his hundredth goal for the Reds in just 165 matches. But then from his first days in the senior team it was obvious that lad Fowler had something special. Less than a month after his senior debut in September 1993, he scored five times in a League Cup tie against Fulham and set the stage for his ultimate ascension to Ian Rush's throne.

Three years on, Fowler is established as one of the top strikers in Europe with a streak of unpredictability that makes him almost impossible to counter. Socceroo and Aston Villa goalkeeper Mark Bosnich describes his technique with a certain awe: "He often shoots early, he doesn't mind where he shoots from, but he seems to get late fade on his shots like a golfer."

Fowler will surely break a swag of goalscoring records before he hangs up his boots, but he's already scored the fastest-ever Premiership hat-trick, in just four-and-a-half minutes against Arsenal in 1994. To add insult to the Gunners' injured pride, he repeated his three-goal feat in the corresponding fixture the following year.

It's a cruel trick of fate that has thrust Alan Shearer into Fowler's path as an obstacle to the young star's apparently-inevitable destiny as England's number one striker. Although the Liverpoolian has made a handful of appearances for England, successive national team coaches Terry Venables and Glenn Hoddle have preferred to build their team around the Newcastle goal machine.

Regardless of the shape of the England side, Fowler, who rather quirkily favours a bowl of Rice Krispies as part of his pre-match meal, seems certain to become a modern day Anfield institution alongside Keegan, Dalglish, Clemence, Souness and a host of others who've helped Liverpool become the most successful English club of the last thirty years.

Fowler is hopeful that his future goalscoring exploits will help Liverpool fans forget the legend of

Robbie's World



lan Rush. It's something Robbie himself must have longed for on numerous occasions during his childhood as the Welsh striker put away his umpteenth goal and secured yet another trophy for the Reds. These days the young striker is only too happy to have the same supporters chanting his name in adulation. A young Evertonian has come a long way.

Is Dons, Is Good?

No-one likes Wimbledon. For years their critics have pointed an accusing finger at the club's rudimentary playing style and consistently poor attendances at Selhurst Park, their borrowed home ground. Even in their finest hour, when the Dons defied all odds and beat Liverpool 1-0 to win the 1988 FA Cup, the applause was muted. Television pundit Jimmy Greaves, for instance, congratulated Wimbledon on winning the Cup without playing an ounce of football.

Against this backdrop of fear, loathing and occasionally grudging admiration, the South London underdogs have amazed the English soccer public with a run of results that has taken them to within striking distance at the top of the Premier League.

It's just another startling chapter in the history of the team that wasn't even in the English league until the mid-1970s. A modest Southern League side with an equally modest home ground at Plough Lane, the club's ambitions were sparked by a sensational run in the 1975 FA Cup when they knocked out the then-First Division side Burnley before being eliminated by league Champions Leeds after a replay.

In 1977 the Dons were elected into the Football League, and after a roller coaster ride between the Third and Fourth Division their first few seasons they won promotion three times between 1983 and 1986 to surprise everyone but themselves as they started the 1986/87 campaign in the First Division. They quickly established a reputation in the top flight as the hard men of English football, and the rough-house approach of the self-styled 'Crazy Gang' was never going to appeal to the soccer purists.

Their burly striker John Fashanu and

controversial midfielder Vinnie Jones seemed to personify the spirit of the club. Fiercely competitive and accepting the occasional red card as an occupational hazard, 'Fash the Bash' and 'Psycho' led Wimbledon to Wembley in 1988 and an FA Cup final clash with four times European Cup winners Liverpool. Dons fans, remembering their Southern League tussles with the likes of Enfield and Wealdstone just 11 years earlier, could hardly take it all in.

On the day, the Gods smiled on Vinnie and the gang. Peter Beardsley had a goal wrongly disallowed, Wimbledon keeper and captain Dave Beasant saved an Aldridge penalty, and a glancing header from stalwart defender Lawrie Sanchez past Bruce Grobbelaar in the first half was enough to win the Cup.

That result remains Wimbledon's greatest achievement in its 107 year existence, and a difficult feat to emulate for a small club consistently forced to sell its best players to balance the books.

Flamboyant club owner Sam Hammam and the managers who've worked under him have managed to keep the club afloat by nurturing young players and selling them on to the major clubs. The London side has produced a string of players who've gone on to international recognition after leaving Wimbledon for more glamorous surroundings.

John Scales, Warren Barton, Keith Curle, Nigel Winterburn, Dave Beasant and Dennis Wise are all former members of the 'Crazy Gang' who've represented England in recent years, and current players Ben Thatcher (no relation), Robbie Earle and Dean Holdsworth are tipped to follow in their footsteps, especially if they can secure a big money transfer elsewhere.

The Premier League table currently shows Wimbledon more than holding their own with the Arsenal, Manchester United and Liverpools of this world and their 50,000 seater stadiums and European Champions League appearances. To give some indication of the Dons' place in the global scene, until three years ago the club's record home attendance was 18,000 for an FA Amateur Cup game against HMS

Victory in 1934/35.

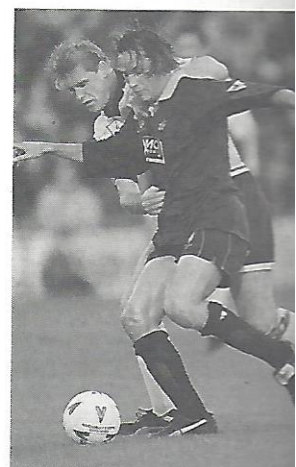
Although there's been speculation recently that the Dons may relocate to Dublin, the sentimentalists might hope that Wimbledon stays in South London defying the odds for a few years yet. They hold the record for the lowest ever crowd at a Premier League/First Division game, their captain Vinnie Jones has been known to bite journalists' noses, the initiation ceremonies for new players at the club are too disgusting to mention - it's an irresistible contrast to the \$60,000 a week salaries and catwalk modelling contracts of their Premier League contemporaries.

To be mixing it with the big boys at the top of the Premiership tree is a dream come true, but Wimbledon aren't getting carried away. After an away win at Sunderland in December that took their unbeaten run to 18

matches, Jones was asked whether he thought the championship was a viable target.

"The championship?" he said dryly. "Yeah, we think Mike Tyson has a great chance of getting it back."

Ah, Wimbledon. No-one likes them, they don't care.



Dean Holdsworth is part of the latest generation of Wimbledon's 'Crazy Gang'.

Dia Straits

Graeme Souness won't make the same mistake again. When someone claiming to be World Footballer of the Year, George Weah, rang the Southampton boss to recommend Senegalese striker Ali Dia, the moustachioed manager was quick off the mark to put Dia into the Saints' starting line-up.

But after a debut game in which the 30-year-old hardly touched the ball, it became apparent that Souness had been the victim of a hoax. Ali Dia was rapidly despatched to non-league side Gateshead, claiming in his defence, "I just want to forget about the Southampton thing. As far as I was concerned, it was a misunderstanding".

Colombia on the march

PHILIP MICALLEF looks at the brave re-emergence of Colombia after the tragic events of 1994.

Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay have ruled South American football for decades. The Big Three have grabbed the lion's share of all there is to be won on the continent, leaving mere crumbs for the other six countries making up the Conmebol confederation.

But for the first time in living memory a fourth country is poised to become a permanent member of this elite club after a string of near misses and impressive performances.

Colombia are running away with their World Cup qualifying section and should become the first side to qualify for the finals in France.

That would make it three finals appearances in a row . . . not bad for a relatively small country of 32 million people, a long way short of Brazil's 150 million. A glance at the history of South American soccer at club and national level makes one realise the sort of power the Big Three have exerted since the turn of the century.

Argentina (15), Uruguay (14) and Brazil (4) have won 33 of the 38 Copa America tournaments. The Copa Libertadores similarly has been the exclusive domain of the same three countries. Argentinian (17), Uruguayan (8) and Brazilian (8) clubs have won 33 of the 37 tournaments. Of course Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay also have won eight World Cups between them. Colombian football pales into insignificance in comparison.

The Colombians' only claim to fame is to have reached the World Cup finals three times, the Copa America final once in 1975 and that club side Nacional Medellin has won the Copa Libertadores once in 1989. But things are changing.

In the late 1980s Colombia was blessed with the simultaneous emergence of a set of top quality players who should still be strong enough to play a major role in the World Cup in 1998.



Meanwhile, Uruguay are seriously risking not making it into the finals at all after a series of losses in the qualifiers. Argentina are still struggling to find their feet in the post-Maradona era and do not seem to have a leader on the field. And Brazil as usual are finding it hard to blend a collection of brilliant stars into a "team" as their typical game of old continues to fade.

So where does this leave Colombia?

The Colombians shocked the world with that sensational 5-0 drubbing of Argentina in Buenos Aires in 1993. But what came as the biggest surprise in a key World Cup qualifier was not the result but the quality and authority of Colombia's performance.

Colombia treated the Argentinians with utter contempt, as if they were playing some third rate side, and they actually made them look third rate. They were promptly installed as one of the favourites

for the World Cup in the USA. But in America it all went horribly wrong for them.

After losing their opening game to Romania, Colombia also went down to the USA through a mixture of bad luck, poor play and the shadow of betting hanging over the squad.

For their third game against Switzerland which they won 2-1, coach Francisco Maturana was warned by anonymous callers to change his line-up, which he did. Unfortunately that victory was not enough to keep the Colombians in the competition and they went home in disgrace. Their great American dream had turned into a nightmare.

But more drama was to follow.

While the tournament was still on, polished defender Andres Escobar, who scored an own goal against the USA, was shot dead by a group of assailants after getting involved in an argument outside a Bogota nightclub.

The callous murder stunned the football world and even Colombia, a country where life is known to be cheap.

Goalkeeper Rene Higuita, who toured Australia in 1995, told Soccer Australia of the anguish he suffered at the death of his old friend Escobar.

"Andres was a very good friend of mine and we played together in Colombia's junior and senior sides for many years," he said. "When he returned home from the USA he rang to say hello but we never managed to get together before he was killed."

The Colombians put the tragic events of 1994 behind them and started their rebuilding process in the 1995 Copa America.

Colombia has an interesting blend of youth and experience and their short passing game is very effective and good to watch.

Crafty Carlos Valderrama, forceful Fred Rincon and feisty Faustino Asprilla are playing as well as ever while Bermudez, Cabrera and Serna are becoming star players in their own right.

It's certainly looking good for Colombia. Who knows, perhaps this time they'll finally get it right. The Big Three could well become the Big Four.

Juve's little prince

continued from page 22

Q *What are your expectations now that Cesare Maldini is the coach of the Italian team?*

A The situation is totally different now. Maldini is used to my style, and I believe I'll have better opportunities. To tell you the truth, I'm very keen to wear the jersey of the "Azzurri" as soon as possible. It's a dream come true.

Q *Speaking of dreams coming true, you're considered today to be the best player in Italy, and one of the five best players in the world. How do you see the situation - does it bother you to be so famous?*

A Not at all. I have always wanted to be the best - that's the truth. So, to be so famous is exactly what I wanted. Therefore I can't complain, because it is, as you say, a dream come true. The love of the people that surround me, the thousands of supporters calling my name in the stadium after every goal, the interviews, the autographs, it's all a very interesting experience, even if it takes away a bit of my privacy. I would be lying to you if I said I didn't like it.

Q *What do you think about being compared to two players as famous as Zico and Platini?*

A It's an honour. Zico was a giant with the ball at his feet, maybe one of the best players in the whole history of soccer. But my real hero is Platini. You know, in my room when I was a kid there was always a big poster of Platini just above my bed, and there still is.

Platini played for Juventus wearing the same number that I wear today. Every time I have the ball at my feet, I think: "What would the French guy do now?" And then I always try to improve, and if I can play up to 20 per cent as well as he did, I'll be satisfied.

Q *Most of the goals you score are beautiful, complex and there's almost never a 'simple' goal. That's the kind of soccer Platini played. What do you think?*

A I try to enjoy soccer. If I didn't enjoy it, I think I'd stop. So when I have the ball I try to

see how far I can reach, and as I said, I try to improve myself as much as possible. To score a goal is a marvellous feeling, but when it's a beautiful one, the pleasure is doubled.

Q *In Italy today, players with a sense of fantasy or creativity are a species in danger of extinction. You're maybe the last of the "fantasy" players left in Italy.*

A It's a problem. I've just been telling you the way I feel when I play - I look for the most spectacular, interesting or fun way to play. But in Italy, and I believe in many other places in the world, coaches and referees are responsible for the dramatic change in beautiful soccer.

Coaches prefer a more powerful, strong and fast kind of game, where the player who has more fitness and muscle is preferred to someone with more skill. It's very sad, but it's the reality. Coaches aren't allowed to lose, so nobody wants to take the risk of playing beautiful football and losing, which the Brazilians did for many years.

But I also blame the referees, who do not take enough serious steps to stop defenders using violence. I believe this violence is a main cause for the change of style, from the technical skills to the muscular way.

Q *Since you've been playing for Juventus the club has undergone a real revolution. Incredibly, Roberto Baggio left, and the top scorers of the team, Gianluca Vialli and Fabrizio Ravanelli, went to England. Do you miss Vialli and Ravanelli?*

A Of course! Both on and off the field. They were always there to help me from the time I started at Juve, and they are very good friends, which is an honour for me. But Vialli is very happy at Chelsea, while Ravanelli made a very good personal economic decision when he signed with Middlesbrough.

Juventus has had some difficulties without them, but today the playing style has changed and Juve continues to win. When they were in the team with me I had a lot more freedom, and I could try different moves, knowing that the experience of Vialli and Ravanelli was there to back me up.

Q *The case of Roberto Baggio is the most interesting. He was the leader and*

the hero of Juventus, but just after you joined, he left the club. Was Juventus too small for two geniuses of the ball like you and Baggio?

A That's not true! It is something the press has tried to make supporters believe, but I can't accept it. Even if we played in the same position, we could give a lot to the team. Baggio was like a teacher to me, and he is a great man, with a good personality. What happened between Juventus and him, I don't know. Maybe the club preferred to have me because I'm younger, but I know that Baggio joined Milan because he wanted to.

Q *What was the most important moment of your career? And the happiest one?*

A Well, the most important for me was the day I started at Juventus, in September 1993. But it's hard to forget that game in Japan, where I was chosen as man of the match, and I helped Juventus win the Inter-continental title, exactly like Platini did in 1985, and we both scored the winning goal.

Q *In Japan everything that has your name on it has been selling like hot cakes. All the Juventus merchandise has also sold well. Do you get any money yourself from these products?*

A You're joking, right? No, I don't receive anything from it. There are all kinds of products - hats, watches, glasses and so on. In Italy there's a cartoon called "Alex", which talks about this player and his friends. There's even a small, cute puppet called Alex, which is also on sale.

Q *Is Australia too far away for me to ask you what you know about soccer there?*

A Well, it is quite far. But Australia is exporting great players. I mean, look at Christian Vieri who is with me at Juventus, and Okon is impressing everyone at Lazio.

It seems to me that Australian players are very brave, they're fighters, and there is no such thing as a lost ball for them. I don't know much more, but I plan to learn more about it, and about the country itself. Vieri and others tell me that it is an amazing country. Ciao to all of you, and I know that many Italians in Australia often wear Juve's shirt. Keep up the good work, amici!

Battle of the Big Two

The big two of German football were battling it out at the top of the Bundesliga as the national league began its two month winter break. A mere two points separated Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund and the championship is likely to be decided in April when Dortmund entertains the Bavarians. ANTHONY FENSOM reports.

Surprisingly, given the quality of the Bundesliga (only two members of Germany's victorious Euro 96 squad play outside their home country), the national competition has only been in existence since 1963.

Prior to the creation of the Bundesliga, German (then West German) football was organised on a regional basis, with the regional winners playing off on a home and away basis before the two group winners disputed the all-German final. With a fully professional national league established, Germany has become arguably the world's most successful football nation.

World Cup winners in 1954, 1974 and 1990, runners-up on three occasions, and an unsurpassed three European championships (twice runners-up) is an impressive record. On a club level, Bayern Munich is one of the handful of European clubs to have achieved the triumvirate of cups (UEFA, Cup-Winners' Cup and European Cup).

Bayern and Dortmund boast the bulk of the German national team, both clubs currently fielding six players each from the Euro 96 squad. With club finances boosted

through the signing of lucrative satellite television contracts (league turnover in 1994 was over \$A260 million), average gates of over 30,000 and European success, the Bundesliga has managed to retain its home-grown talent. Andreas Kopke has been the only member of the winning side to venture abroad, transferring from relegated Eintracht Frankfurt to Olympique Marseille.

The improved financial fortunes of the Bundesliga have helped its clubs attract quality foreigners, with approximately one quarter of the league's footballers now of foreign extraction. The main contributors have been Holland, Croatia and Denmark, with Brazil, Bulgaria and Switzerland among a host of other nations providing players.

Current champions Dortmund include Brazilian Julio Cesar, Portuguese Paulo Sousa (formerly of Juventus) and Swiss international Stephane Chapuisat, while Bayern has lured the first Italian professional to the league, Ruggiero Rizzitelli.

VfB Stuttgart has a Balkan influence with Croatians Zvonimir Soldo and Fredi Bobic (a naturalised German) joining Krassimir Balakov of Bulgaria. League top scorer Sean Dundee of Karlsruhe is of South African nationality, but has applied for German citizenship with the encouragement of German national coach Berti Vogts.

The Bundesliga's foreign influence is set to increase as a result of the Bosman ruling, with the 36 professional clubs now permitted to contract an unlimited number of UEFA players, in addition to three players each from outside the European Union. Transfer fees have been halved, with

a money pool to be created from 1997/98 of approximately \$A40 million (collected from pay-TV revenue) aimed at reducing the financial disparities between the rich and poor of the league.

The sole Australian representative is Damian Mori, after the departure of Ned Zelic and Mark Schwarzer. Zelic enjoyed a relatively successful period at Dortmund but Schwarzer struggled to gain a place in the first team at Kaiserslautern. Mori joined Borussia Moenchengladbach for a total fee of \$A1.2 million in October.

The 34 round Bundesliga season commenced in August, with Bayern under the guidance of second-time coach Giovanni Trapattoni, beginning their campaign with a 2-1 away victory over St. Pauli of Hamburg. Dortmund by contrast suffered a 4-2 defeat at the hands of Bayer Leverkusen. Suffering a number of injuries to key players, Dortmund had earlier been knocked out of the German Cup by amateur side Wattenscheid 09, losing 4-3 after extra time.

Dortmund recovered from this disappointment to finish the 'autumn series' on 34 points, two points behind Bayern. The Dortmunders have largely concentrated on the European Champions League this season, with UEFA contributing \$A4 million to the club coffers by virtue of Dortmund reaching the quarter-finals. Dortmund finished second in Group B behind Atletico Madrid and will face French champions Auxerre in March 1997. Should Dortmund reach the final, they will enjoy the luxury of massive home support after UEFA awarded the 28 May final to Munich.

UEFA Cup holders Bayern, by contrast, were eliminated in the first round of the Cup by Spanish side Valencia, Bayern losing 3-1 on aggregate. Fellow German clubs Hamburg and Karlsruhe have also been knocked out, with only Schalke advancing to the quarter-finals. Schalke will meet Bayern's conquerors Valencia in March. DFB Cup holders Kaiserslautern failed to progress beyond the first round of the Cup-Winners' Cup, losing to Red Star Belgrade.

Twelve time Bundesliga winners Bayern are now free to concentrate on clinching

another national title, with the real possibility of a domestic double with a quarter-final in the German Cup against Karlsruhe to be played in February. The German Cup semi-finalists include amateur side Energie Cottbus, Hamburger SV and VfB Stuttgart.

Bayern Munich's main concern at the moment is the future of Jurgen Klinsmann. Klinsmann celebrated the scoring of his 100th goal in the Bundesliga by threatening to depart the club unless Italian coach Trapattoni changed his defensive tactics. Although contracted until 1998, Klinsmann may choose to execute an opt-out clause to join Berti Vogts as assistant national coach. Rumours of a bitter feud between Klinsmann and club captain Lothar Matthaus have not helped internal stability, although both pledged to work together.

As insurance, Bayern lured 'Super Mario', Mario Basler from Werder Bremen, a midfield general with expertise at dead-ball situations, for a fee of approximately \$A7 million. Young German striker Carston Jancker has also signed from Rapid

Vienna for \$A1.2 million in a bid to provide Klinsmann with a quality partner up front.

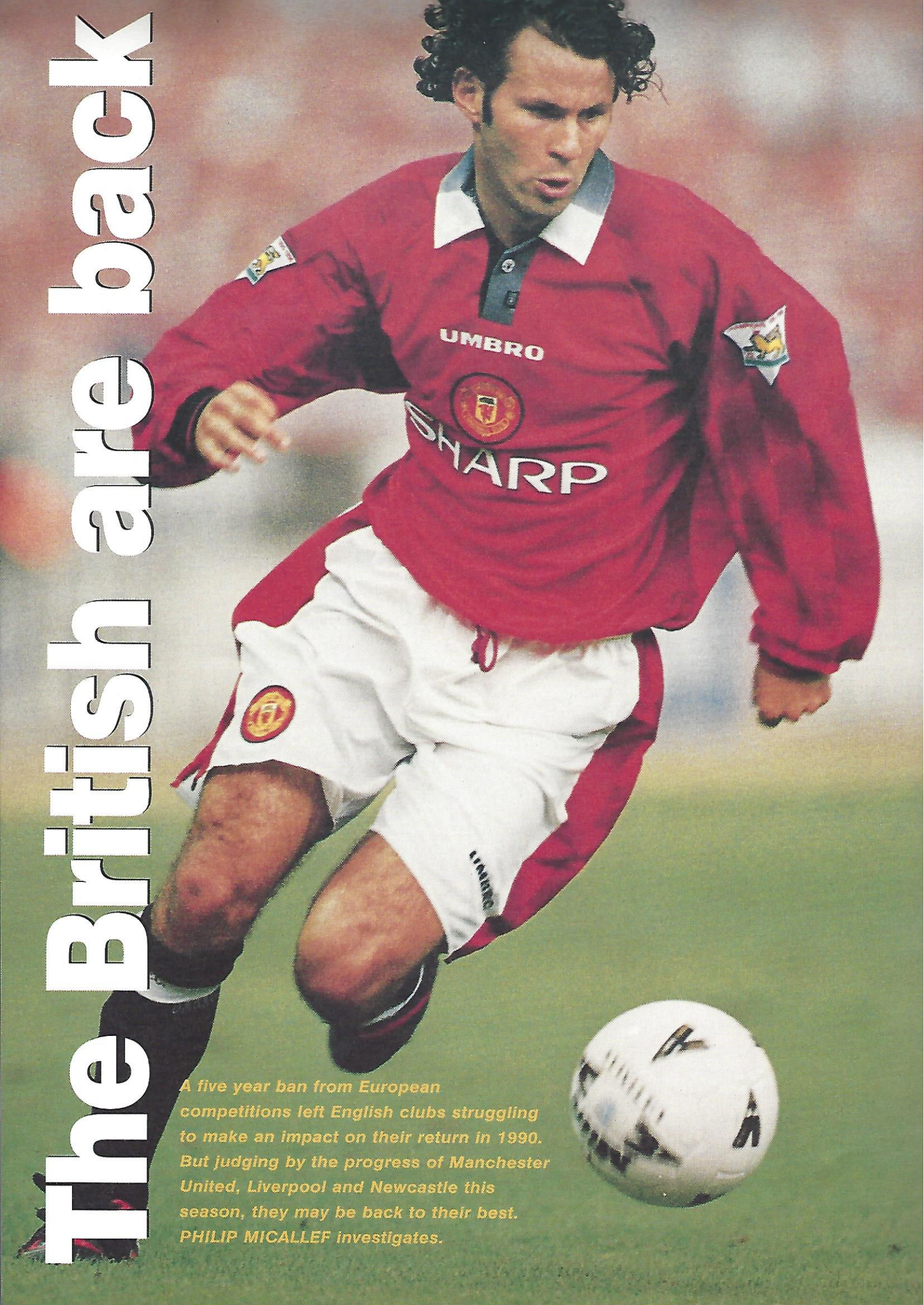
With Dortmund seeking to improve on its 1995/96 Champions League quarter-final exit (losing to Ajax 3-0 on aggregate), Bayern has an excellent opportunity to end distracted Dortmund's run of championships. But the Munich club will have to overcome internal bickering to seize the title, with Dortmund and also VfB Stuttgart likely to push the millionaires right up until the last round in May.



Right - Euro '96 hero Oliver Bierhoff is one of the few German players playing their trade abroad.

Above - Bayern Munich star Jurgen Klinsmann holds up the 1995/96 UEFA Cup trophy. The Bavarian side is looking to capture the Bundesliga title from reigning champions Borussia Dortmund.

The British are back



A five year ban from European competitions left English clubs struggling to make an impact on their return in 1990. But judging by the progress of Manchester United, Liverpool and Newcastle this season, they may be back to their best. PHILIP MICALLEF investigates.

The quarter-final line-up of Europe's major club tournaments leaves little doubt about the giant strides made by the English game in the last few years. As the continent's best 24 teams polish their armoury for the forthcoming skirmishes, one cannot help notice that English clubs are represented in each competition and with justified claims for a rare "grand slam".

The reputation of English clubs fell to an all-time low in the early 90s. The once-feared British had become so out of touch with the continental game that it was not uncommon for them to be all eliminated well before Christmas, sometimes even to third-rate opposition.

While the likes of AC Milan and Barcelona dominated European football with their special brand of exciting soccer, English clubs were left to lick their wounds and wonder when and where their next Euro triumph would come from. The good old days of the 70s and early 80s were looking just that - good old days.

Although Arsenal had a brief flirtation with glory by taking out the Cup Winners' Cup in 1994, the story of English participation in Europe after the Heysel tragedy and UEFA's subsequent five-year ban was one of hopelessness and despair. But not any more.

League and Cup double winners Manchester United came back from two losses to Juventus and a shock home defeat to Fenerbahce to overwhelm Rapid Vienna 2-0 in Austria and squeeze into the last eight of the Champions League.

They became the first English team in 11 years to reach that stage of Europe's most glamorous club competition.

Eternal rivals Liverpool, who know a thing or two about playing on the continent, are nicely poised to reach the semi-finals of the Cup Winners' Cup while Newcastle are among the favourites to win the UEFA Cup.

The Red Devils face Porto in the quarter-finals and will give the Portuguese the distinct advantage of playing the second leg at home. United are fully aware of the big job ahead of them but, as captain Eric Cantona said after the Vienna game, the

side always plays much better in spring than in autumn.

United owe their success in Vienna to Danish goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel, who made a truly fantastic one-handed save to deny Rapid striker Rene Wagner when the score was still 0-0.

Wagner must have thought he had scored with a header destined for the back of the net but Schmeichel dived acrobatically to his right to scoop the ball up and turn it behind the post.

The save brought back vivid memories of Gordon Banks' memorable save from Pele's header in the 1970 World Cup. Some said Schmeichel's save was even better.

Liverpool have had an easy run in the Cup Winners' Cup although they had a few anxious moments in the last round against Sion at Anfield. The Swiss were actually leading the tie at one stage before the Reds rolled up their sleeves to run out 6-3 winners.

Liverpool are not expected to have too many problems in the quarter-finals against Brann Bergen of Norway. The Reds could not conceal their delight at the favourable draw, though Milan might have treated their Champions League clash with Rosenborg the same way... and look what happened to them!

Newcastle face French title-chasers Monaco in what should be the tie of the UEFA Cup round. Kevin Keegan's boys have struggled to impose themselves in away matches and would need to build a solid lead in the first leg at St James' Park in order to travel to the principality with any degree of comfort.

Colombian striker Faustino Asprilla, who will miss the first leg through suspension, gave Newcastle their spot in the quarter-finals virtually single-handed with a sparkling performance in the third round against Metz of France.

With Newcastle hanging on to a 0-0 draw which would have given them victory on away goals, Asprilla came up with two late goals - the second an absolute beauty - to set Keegan's mind at rest.

Monaco have their stars - not least new

French whiz kid Thierry Henry - but it will be hard for Jean Tigana's men to contain the "terrible trio" of Alan Shearer, Les Ferdinand and David Ginola.

Spain also has every reason to be proud of its achievements this season. Champions Atletico Madrid won a titanic tussle with Borussia Dortmund and won their Champions League group on goal difference.

Atletico's reward is an attractive confrontation with Ajax Amsterdam, who should be able to make use of a fully-fit Jari Litmanen.

Barcelona, who recently doubled the salary of their star Brazilian striker Ronaldo to \$4m in a new deal that will keep him at the club till 2006, are going strong in the Cup Winners' Cup and will play Swedish side Solna for a place in the semi-finals.

In the UEFA Cup Spain has the luxury of two sides: Tenerife and Valencia. The Canary Islanders face Brondby and Valencia meet Schalke 04 and a semi-final spot is within reach for both Spanish sides.

If English football has re-established itself

as a force to be reckoned with in this season's competitions and Spain has confirmed its status as a perennial giant of the European game, the same cannot be said of Italy and Germany who are both having a shocker.

The Italians have already lost Milan, Roma, Lazio and Parma, while Germany's Kaiserslautern, Bayern, Hamburg, Borussia Moenchengladbach and Karlsruhe have already been eliminated.

The latter's defeat against Danish side



Juventus coach Marcello Lippi - can he lead the Italians to consecutive Champions League titles?

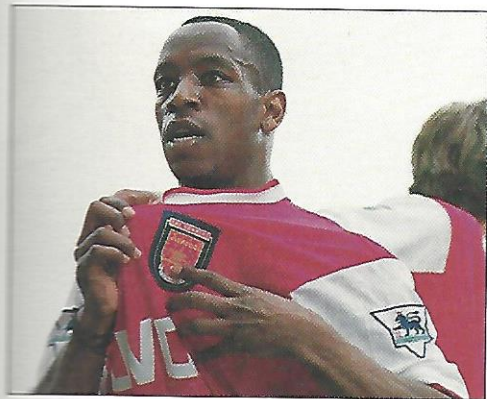
Where soccer meets the chequered flag

by Mike Kable



Soccer and Formula One racing are two fast-moving sports that might seem poles apart, but they share more than just the fact that the foundations for both were laid in Europe.

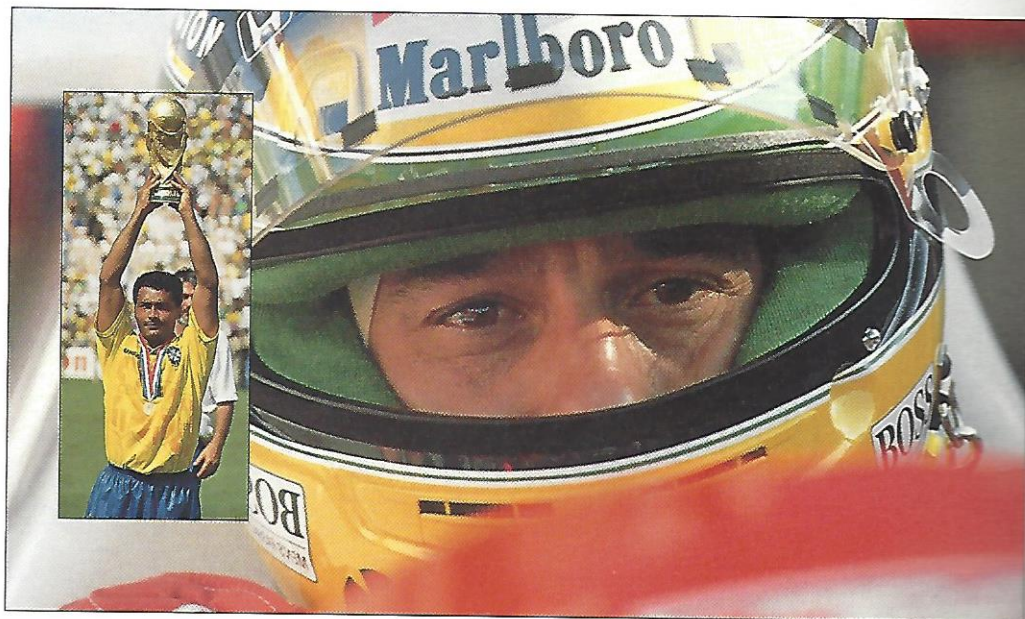
1 As prominent Formula One journalist Alan Henry revealed in his book, 'History of the Grand Prix', it was an abiding interest in soccer that started a Surrey timber merchant, Ken Tyrrell, on the road to becoming the constructor of the cars which carried Scotsman Jackie Stewart to two world championship titles in the early 1970s. Tyrrell's local soccer club arranged a trip for its members to the Silverstone circuit. He joined the outing, was fascinated by what he saw that day and ultimately founded his own team, which still exists.



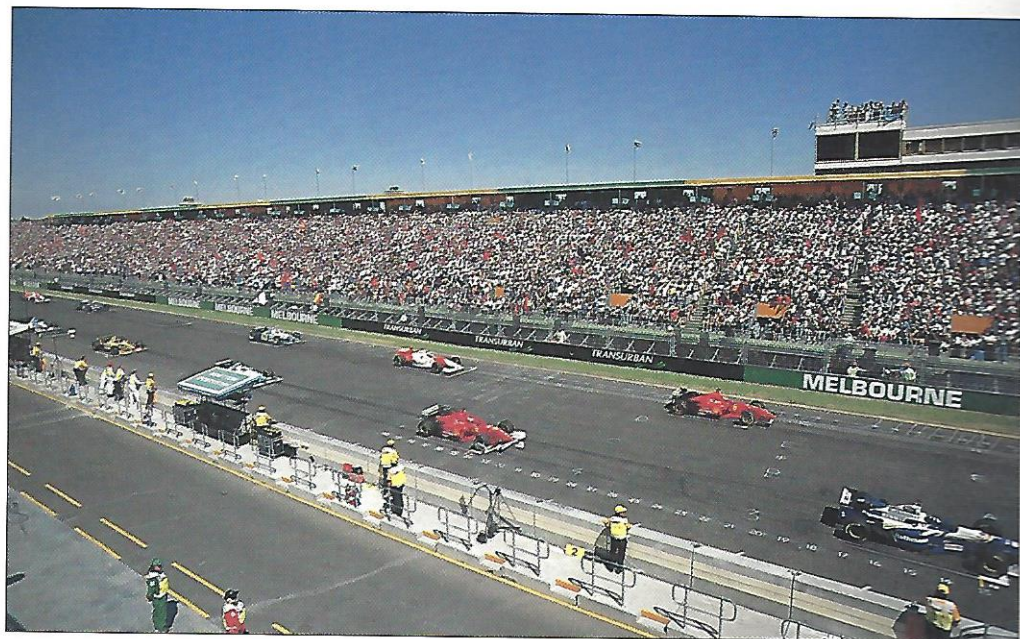
2 When Damon Hill claimed his first World Driver's Championship in 1996, he became probably the first Arsenal fan to win the coveted title. Or are there other closet Gunners supporters among the Formula One greats?



3 Brazil's national team cemented the link between football and Formula One in an emotional tribute during their World Cup-winning triumph in the USA in 1994, when they carried a banner honouring the memory of their late and great compatriot Ayrton Senna, the charismatic triple world champion who was killed earlier that year. Senna, a soccer fanatic, had been an enormous inspiration to all Brazilians.



4 South Melbourne soccer club couldn't be happier with having the Australian Grand Prix on their doorstep. Their Middle Park stadium was the scene of many triumphs for the club, but by 1995 it had clearly seen better days, and the need to demolish their old ground to make way for the track was a blessing in disguise. The move to a new stadium on the perimeter of the Grand Prix circuit has been well received by both the club's supporters and administration, so much so that the Lakers proudly sport a chequered flag on their new logo.



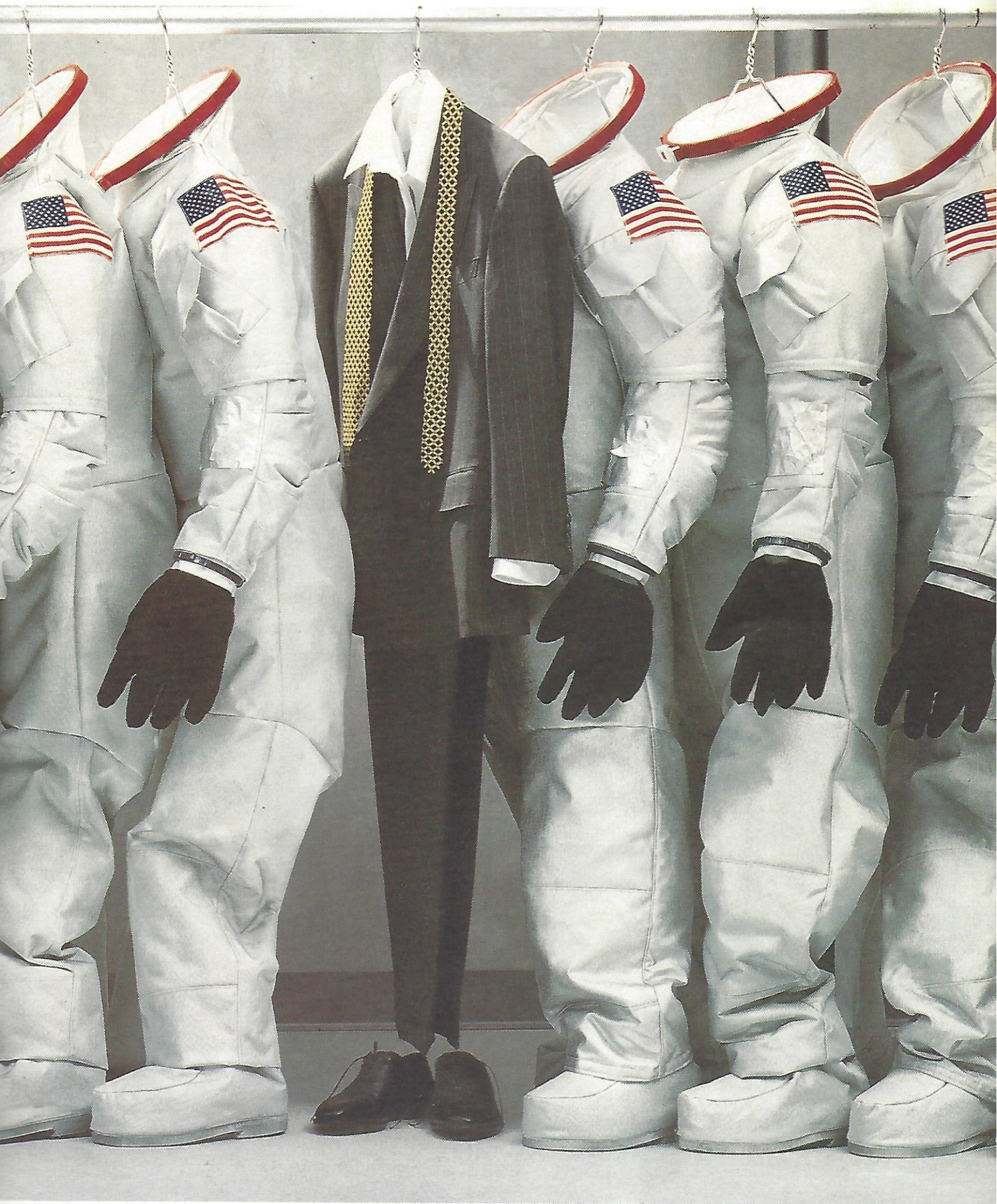
5 January 1997 has seen extensive media interest focusing on the banks of Melbourne's Albert Park Lake as Terry Venables made his first appearance as coach of the Socceroos at the Lakeside Stadium.

Just a few weeks later, competitors in the Australian Grand Prix will tear past the same stadium 52 times in their quest for the chequered flag. And there'll be a few spectators there to help them on their way - a world record 400,000 attended the 1996 race, Melbourne's first Formula One event for 40 years.



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Snap Shots

The launch of the Carlton soccer club at their Optus Oval ground late last year was quite a shindig, with everyone from Soccer Australia chairman David Hill to Carlton AFL club president John Elliott to Canberra Cosmos and former Socceroo ace Paul Wade putting in an appearance. Here are some action shots taken on the night.



John Elliott presses the flesh with Steve Roach from Nike, who'll be supplying Carlton soccer club's kit in a major deal announced at the launch. David Hill looks on approvingly.



The Carlton soccer club power brokers line up under the Optus Oval floodlights (from left to right): Athol Hodgetts, Lou Sticca, David Hill, Dominic Crivelli, Jack Reilly, Peter Nikolakopoulos, Robert Shannon, John Valmorbida, Peter Meehan.



Carn the Blues! Future Carlton soccer club fans drink a toast to a bright future.

The British are back

continued from page 49

Brondby in the UEFA Cup must rank with the worst moments in German football history. Karlsruhe seemed to have a foot in the quarters after comfortably beating the Danes 3-1 away. But, as they did at Anfield two seasons ago, Brondby overturned a home defeat by winning away – this time by an astonishing 5-0.

Serie A and Bundesliga survivors are few.

In the Champions' Cup, holders Juventus are looking good and it would surprise no-one if they won back-to-back titles in the Munich final in May. Of course, it remains to be seen if they can retain the splendid form they have shown in the autumn and early winter, but they nonetheless should be too experienced for Norway's Rosenberg.

Borussia Dortmund, as usual, will be a hard nut to crack, especially if they manage to overcome their huge injury problems.

Their next opponents are French champions Auxerre, whose Australian midfielder Ned Zelic will be keen to impress his old mates from Germany.

Fiorentina are not expected to go much further in the Cup Winners' Cup. After struggling to beat Sparta Prague, the Italians face the Benfica of Portugal in a game that could go either way.

Liverpool and Barcelona will be hot favourites to play in the final in Rotterdam if they qualify and are kept apart in the semis.

Internazionale appear to stand a good chance of winning their third UEFA Cup, especially after brushing aside Portugal's Boavista 7-1 on aggregate.

The Milanese are quite a formidable outfit on paper but have yet to gel as a team. But if they do get their act together Roy Hodgson's side could go all the way. Next up Inter face the tough Belgians of Anderlecht.

The Draw

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Auxerre (France) | v | Borussia Dortmund (Germany) |
| Atletico Madrid (Spain) | v | Ajax Amsterdam (Holland) |
| Rosenborg (Norway) | v | Juventus (Italy) |
| Manchester United (England) | v | Porto (Portugal) |

CUP WINNERS' CUP

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Benfica (Portugal) | v | Fiorentina (Italy) |
| Paris St-Germain (France) | v | AEK Athens (Greece) |
| SK Brann (Norway) | v | Liverpool (England) |
| Barcelona (Spain) | v | AIK Solna (Sweden) |

UEFA CUP

| | | |
|----------------------|---|------------------------|
| Newcastle (England) | v | AS Monaco (France) |
| Tenerife (Spain) | v | Brondby (Denmark) |
| Schalke (Germany) | v | Valencia (Spain) |
| Anderlecht (Belgium) | v | Internazionale (Italy) |

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